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# Counter Currents: Arthur Lower, Lincoln Colcord, and Ideological Isolationism in Interwar Canada and the United States

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**COUNTER CURRENTS: ARTHUR LOWER, LINCOLN COLCORD, AND  
IDEOLOGICAL ISOLATIONISM IN INTERWAR  
CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES**

By

James Theodore Spruce  
B.A., University of Maine, 2018

A THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts  
(in History)

The Graduate School  
The University of Maine  
May 2018

Advisory Committee:

Elizabeth McKillen, Adelaide & Alan Bird Professor of History, Advisor  
Richard Judd, Professor of History  
Scott See, Libra Professor Emeritus

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Thesis Advisor: Elizabeth McKillen

An Abstract of the Thesis Presented  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
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This thesis is a comparative study of the ideology of isolationism in interwar Canada and the United States. It proceeds with that comparison using an individual subject from each country as a case study. For Canada, the subject is the historian and social scientist Arthur R.M. Lower; for the United States, it is the journalist and fiction author Lincoln Ross Colcord. Both men are worthy of study as individual isolationists of note, but they are also appropriate for the comparison because of the similarity of their isolationist positions and due to their personal backgrounds. Through the 1930s, Colcord and Lower publicized their support for foreign policies centered on unilateralism, neutrality, a limited but strictly prioritized national interest, and a potent fear of war. But at heart, they each had different ends based on their highest ideals for their respective countries.

The core of this project is to explore isolationism as an ideology of North American themes and national variations. Comparing an American and a Canadian example of this mindset

also brings a broader perspective to a subject too commonly associated with the United States alone. The parallels between Colcord and Lower show that isolationist thinking was not an American possession, but that its reach extended to the other half of the continent as well.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I also thank the staff and volunteers of the Phillips Memorial Library at the Penobscot Marine Museum for being the most accommodating hosts a researcher could ever hope for. They made every one of the days I visited a true joy.

My special thanks go to Professor Parker Albee for forwarding me privately held Lincoln Colcord correspondence that, otherwise, I never would have seen. I also thank the late Nina Colcord for welcoming me into her home to see the magnificent Colcord family collection of books and maritime antiques. May she rest in peace.

Last but not least, I thank my parents, Kathleen and Peter Spruce, and my grandparents, Helga and Daniel Cross, for helping to make me who I am and everything I will become. No matter what, we carry each other.

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## INTRODUCTION

For many Americans during the 1930s participation in foreign conflicts was a national dilemma as serious as the Great Depression. As that decade progressed and the possibility of war loomed larger, an ideological battle ensued between two loosely formed yet bitterly hostile camps, one side favoring U.S. isolation, and the other for more active American intervention in the Old World. This period of intense public debate about national foreign policy, however, was not just a phenomenon of the United States. It had a northern counterpart in the country's closest, most economically important, and least considered foreign relation: Canada. North of the border raged another foreign policy debate, one defined by many of the same military, economic, and moral dilemmas as that in the south, and one likewise divided between roughly formed factions for more versus less involvement in world affairs and world organization.

In Canada, as in the United States, the anti-interventionists were resoundingly defeated; ultimately, they were the losers of those struggles to determine the two countries' national destinies.<sup>1</sup> Yet this does not diminish their historical importance for their time or the present day. Although they were the defeated party of the interwar foreign policy debate, the anti-interventionists were nevertheless a recognized faction which deeply carved its positions into the public discourse. Their cohort was diverse, dynamic, and a powerful voice of opposition against the trend toward entanglement in American and Canadian external policy. Their failure is neither a reason to forget their struggle nor to neglect its many faded details.

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, one of the pioneer scholars of American isolationism, the late Wayne Cole, claimed that this defeat was nothing short of inevitable, an outcome pre-determined by a simultaneous domestic transition from a rural, insular "old" America to an urban-industrial nation fixed on asserting itself around the world. Wayne S. Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists, 1932-1945* (Lincoln, NB.: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 555-56.

This project, however, will not cover the full breadth of American or Canadian anti-interventionists in the decade preceding Pearl Harbor. The existing scholarship on those subjects is substantial in both quantity and quality; another macro-level treatment would require space and additional research far beyond the limitations of a thesis.<sup>2</sup> More importantly, however, is the fact that neither country ever produced a truly unified movement against intervention in foreign wars. Binding together either the American or Canadian opponents of involvement in overseas wars under a single banner has thus been a complicated exercise, one made even more difficult in the Canadian case by the existence of largely separate English- and French-Canadian factions.<sup>3</sup> Constructing such a singular history has only been possible only using as broad a title as anti-interventionism. Justus Doenecke, the premier scholar of American anti-interventionism before, during, and after the Second World War, justifiably favors this term for his comprehensive work. Anti-interventionist is less politically loaded, more inclusive (hence more unifying), and validates one of the most common labels that the diverse multitude of its

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<sup>2</sup> Historians of anti-interventionism and isolationism in the United States have been noticeably more productive and more direct in their studies than Canadians addressing their own country's strain of the ideology. The body of work on the American side is truly immense and wide ranging, and while the most fruitful period of work was done in the 1960s and 1970s, the output of new analyses has been steady since the 1950s. Canadian scholarship overall offers valuable insights on interwar Canadian anti-interventionism and isolationist sentiment, but generally that research has come in piecemeal fashion as part of works dedicated to other topics or to the 1930s broadly. See, for example, H. Blair Neatby, *The Politics of Chaos: Canada in the Thirties* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1972), 163-70, Donald Creighton, *The Forked Road: Canada 1939-1957* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975), 15-17, and C.P. Stacey, *Canada and the Age of Conflict*, Vol. 2, *1921-1948, The Mackenzie King Era* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 231-34. Robert Bothwell's "The Canadian Isolationist Tradition." *International Journal* 54, no. 1 (1998), 76-87, is a half-exception to the rule; only a fraction of the article is actually dedicated to the 1930s. David Lenarcic's "Bordering on War: A Comparison of Canadian and American Neutralist Sentiment During the 1930s," *The American Review of Canadian Studies* (Summer 1994), 217-228, also fits the pattern in part. Since his article was a comparative study, Lenarcic naturally devotes only half his attention to Canadian anti-interventionism, and despite his title, the focus of that half leans mainly towards the futile efforts of Canadians to pass neutrality legislation in the wake of the American Neutrality Acts of 1935, 1936, and 1937.

<sup>3</sup> At least one Canadian scholar has attempted to bridge the gap between these two branches of Canadian anti-interventionism, see P.B. Waite, "French Canadian Isolationism and English Canada: An Elliptical Foreign Policy, 1935-1939," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 18, No. 2 (Summer 1983), 111-43. For the purposes of this thesis, though, any unqualified "Canadian" isolationism will by default refer to English-speaking Canadians, who were more than half the country's population during the 1930s and the main group responsible for shaping its foreign policy debate.



adherents actually applied to themselves.<sup>4</sup> David Lenarcic, author of the most thorough treatment to date of English Canadian anti-interventionists, asserts precisely the same point for very similar reasons.<sup>5</sup>

Anti-interventionists in both the United States and Canada came in many varieties, from mainstream pacifists and economic protectionists to fascists and communists with ties to Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. Each subgroup had its own motivations for keeping their country detached from the problems of the wider world. This project lays aside the largely settled issue of whether the United States' or Canada's foreign policies between the world wars were even "isolationist" at all.<sup>6</sup> Instead, its focus is only a single but important subset of the broader American and Canadian anti-interventionist groups: ideological isolationists. Several American historians have gone notably far in dissecting the mentality of interwar isolationism, and my use of the term ideological isolationists stems partly out of their analyses.<sup>7</sup> In the most basic sense, I

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<sup>4</sup> In addition to "anti-interventionist," Doenecke has also noted that labels such as "neutralist," "nationalist," and "unilateralist" were more common terms of self-identification during the 1930s and 40s than isolationist. See Justus Doenecke and John E. Wilz, *From Isolation to War, 1931-1941* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davis, Inc., 2003), 4, and Justus Doenecke, *Storm on the Horizon: The Challenge to American Intervention, 1939-1941* (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 2003), x-xi.

<sup>5</sup> David Lenarcic, "Where Angels Fear to Tread: Neutralist and Non-Interventionist Sentiment in Inter-War English Canada" (dissertation, York University, 1991), 12-19. Citing the bewildering diversity of even English Canadian non-interventionists alone, Lenarcic gave his broad study an axis point in a particular but critical dilemma faced by that whole group, Canada's constitutional and legal right to neutrality in the event of a British war. While the non-interventionists' struggle to resolve this issue was important to the Canadian foreign policy debate of the 1930s, it was not a driving concern for the Canadian subject of this thesis. This section of Lenarcic's dissertation was subsequently converted into an article, "Pragmatism Over Principle: The Canadian Neutrality League, 1938-1939," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 29, No. 2 (Summer 1994), 128-46.

<sup>6</sup> Several Americans have made convincing arguments against that proposition, see Bear Braumoeller, "The Myth of American Isolationism" *Foreign Policy Analysis* 6 (2010), 349-371, and the eminent William Appleman Williams, "The Legend of Isolationism in the 1920s," *Science and Society* 18, No. 1 (Winter 1954), 1-20. For an authoritative Canadian debunking of the Prime Minister Mackenzie King's oft-labeled isolationist foreign policy, see J.L. Granatstein and Robert Bothwell, "'A Self-Evident National Duty': Canadian Foreign Policy, 1935-1939," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 3 (January 1975), 212-33.

<sup>7</sup> I refer here to Manfred Jonas, *Isolationism in America, 1935-1941* (Chicago: Imprint Publications, 1990), the "Strains of Isolationism" appendix in Christopher McKnight Nichols, *Promise and Peril: America at the Dawn of a Global Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 347-52, and especially Ross Kennedy, "The Ideology of American Isolationism: 1931-1939," *Cercles* 5 (2002), 57-76.

define ideological isolationism as a kind of formula – nationalism over internationalism – one whose “quotient” must be calculated on an individual basis. Their degrees of national detachment from the world, however, were always selective rather than total. More particularly, ideological isolationists were individuals whose view of world affairs centered around a variable medley of principles: prioritizing the national interest over the interests of other countries, appreciation of North America’s geographic security and continental insularity, skepticism of international organization, a jaded view of the First World War and its legacy, a preference for neutrality in foreign policy, a denial of national responsibility to participate fully in the international scene, and above all, a fundamental fear of the negative consequences of participating in wars abroad.

This project will use a representative example of ideological isolationism from the United States and Canada as a frame for studying the larger groups. Two public intellectuals of the interwar period – American author and journalist Lincoln Ross Colcord (1883-1947) and Canadian historian and social scientist Arthur R.M. Lower (1889-1988) – are appropriate for this comparison because of the similarity of their isolationist positions and due to their personal backgrounds. Both were professional writers prominent in their respective fields (political journalism and maritime literature for Colcord, and Canadian history and social commentary for Lower), both were self-described liberals and enthusiastic pundits on social issues like civil liberties and political dissent, and both were dedicated “realists” with keen personal interests in international affairs before and during the Second World War.

Colcord and Lower both left marked impressions in important areas of American and Canadian history, a fact reflected by their prominent places in a variety of historiographies. By the mid-1970s, Lower’s reputation as a scholar was high enough to warrant a lofty title, “the dean of

Canadian historians.”<sup>8</sup> While peers like Donald Creighton also earned that same label, Lower’s body of work indeed influenced a generation of post-war Canadian students and historians, particularly his conception of Canada’s gradual socio-political evolution from “colony to nation.”<sup>9</sup> As such, the historical work of Arthur Lower has been the subject of intense study since the 1970s.<sup>10</sup> So, too, have Lower’s passionate nationalism, anti-immigration activism, liberalism, and civil libertarianism made him a popular subject for Canadian histories in those quarters.<sup>11</sup>

Although in his lifetime most of his fame sprang from his maritime-themed fiction and literary criticism, Lincoln Colcord’s work as a journalist in Washington during and after the First World War have been his most lasting legacy as an historical figure. Beginning the war with the Philadelphia *Public Ledger* as a liberal ally of the Wilson administration and a close confidant of Edward House, within a year of the armistice he had moved to the *Nation* and politically to the left, becoming an implacable enemy of the president and a critic of his foreign policy failures.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Richard A. Preston, review of *History and Myth: Arthur Lower and the Making of Canadian Nationalism*, edited by Welf H. Heick, *International Journal* 31, No. 3 (Summer 1976), 548-50.

<sup>9</sup> For Lower’s *magnum opus* on this theme and several others prevalent in his oeuvre – Canada as a “North American” nation and one necessarily formed by the coexistence of English and French together – see A.R.M. Lower, *Colony to Nation: A History of Canada* (Toronto: Longmans, Green & Company, 1946).

<sup>10</sup> The outstanding and pioneering work here is Carl Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History: Aspects of English-Canadian Historical Writing, 1900-1970* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1976), whose chapter-length analysis of Lower’s work and personal background touches on the full breadth of the historian’s methodology, tropes, and political views. Useful, too, is the *festschrift* of respectful essays by Lower’s students and peers, *His Own Man: Essays in Honour of Arthur Reginald Marsden Lower*, edited by W.H. Heick and Roger Graham (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1974), although none of the essays in this collection delve into their subject’s 1930s isolationism. Lower as historian also figures large in Donald A. Wright, *The Professionalization of History in English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> See C.P. Champion, *The Strange Demise of British Canada: The Liberals and Canadian Nationalism, 1964-1968* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010), Jose E. Igartua *The Other Quiet Revolution: National Identities in English Canada, 1945-1971* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2005), Damien-Claude Belanger, *Prejudice and Pride: Canadian Intellectuals Confront the United States, 1891-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), Kristi Corlett, “A Dream of Homogeneity: Arthur Lower’s National Vision and Its Relationship to Immigrants and Immigration in Canada, 1920-1946,” (MA Thesis, Queen’s University, Kingston, 1995), Scott Fleming, “Of Balance Wheels and Bodies Politic: Arthur Lower and the Liberal Vision of Canadian History,” *History of Intellectual Culture* 10, No. 1 (2012/13), 1-20, and Christopher MacLennan, *Towards the Charter: Canadians and the Demand for a National Bill of Rights, 1929-1960* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> Drawing from both men’s personal papers, Christopher Lasch offers the most intensive analysis of Colcord’s relationship with Edward House and Colcord’s psychology as a liberal with radical inclinations, see *The New*

Colcord's reputation as an extremely outspoken sympathizer with the Bolshevik Revolution and an American advocate for Soviet Russia has also earned him special historical attention.<sup>13</sup>

Despite these massive bodies of historical work assessing both men in such a range of fields, their legacies as isolationists have been under-explored. In contrast with other confirmed Canadian isolationists like Frank Underhill,<sup>14</sup> F.R. Scott,<sup>15</sup> O.D. Skelton,<sup>16</sup> and William Arthur Deacon,<sup>17</sup> and with less extreme anti-interventionists like Escott Reid,<sup>18</sup> Lower lacks a comprehensive intellectual biography tying his isolationism in with the many other shifting strands of his worldview. Besides Lower's own memoir of 1967 – which, while remarkably frank, is naturally a self-selected history leaving out important and unflattering details – his isolationism has been only periodically studied.<sup>19</sup> Much the same can be said of Lincoln Colcord,

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*Radicalism in America: The Intellectual as a Social Type* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), 225-50. More on Colcord's relationship with House, his place House's circle of followers, and his wartime journalism can be found in Igna Floto, "Woodrow Wilson: War Aims, Peace Strategy, and the European Left," in *Woodrow Wilson and a Revolutionary World, 1913-1921*, edited by Arthur S. Link (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), Godfrey Hodgson, *Woodrow Wilson's Right Hand: The Life of Colonel Edward M. House* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), James Startt, *Woodrow Wilson, the Great War, and the Fourth Estate* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2017), Brad Snyder, *The House of Truth: A Washington Political Salon and the Foundation of American Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), and especially John Reinertson, "Colonel House, Woodrow Wilson and European Socialism 1917-1919," (PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1971), who is second only to Lasch in his work with Colcord's papers.

<sup>13</sup> Colcord appears extensively in Christopher Lasch, *American Liberals and the Russian Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962) and with variable frequency in Michael Cassella-Blackburn, *The Donkey, the Carrot, and the Club: William Bullitt and Soviet-American Relations, 1917-1948* (Westport, CN: Praeger, 2004), David W. McFadden, *Alternative Paths: Soviets and Americans, 1917-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), Markku Ruotsila, *British and American Anti-Communism before the Cold War* (London: Frank Cass, 2001), and Kathrine Siegel, *Loans and Legitimacy: The Evolution of Soviet-American Relations, 1919-1933* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1996).

<sup>14</sup> R. Douglas Francis, *Frank Underhill: Intellectual Provocateur* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986). Kenneth Dewar, *Frank Underhill and the Politics of Ideas* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015).

<sup>15</sup> Sandra Djwa *The Politics of the Imagination: A Life of F.R. Scott* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1987).

<sup>16</sup> Terry Crowley, *Marriage of Minds: Isabel and Oscar Skelton Reinventing Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003). Norman Hillmer, *O.D. Skelton: A Portrait of Canadian Ambition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015).

<sup>17</sup> Clara Thomas and John Watt Lennox, *William Arthur Deacon: A Canadian Literary Life* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982).

<sup>18</sup> *Escott Reid: Diplomat and Scholar*, edited by Greg Donaghy, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004). J.L. Granatstein's contribution for this very biographical *festshrift*, "Becoming Difficult: Escott Reid's Early Years," details the young Reid's anti-interventionist streak at some length, see *ibid.*, 11-22.

<sup>19</sup> Arthur R. M. Lower, *My First Seventy-Five Years* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1967). The three most direct historical analyses of Lower's isolationism can be found in Carl Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History*, 131-34,

whose isolationism has been even less probed than his Canadian counterpart's. Unlike some of his closest isolationist friends and colleagues, Edwin Borchard and John Bassett Moore,<sup>20</sup> Amos Pinchot,<sup>21</sup> Oswald Garrison Villard,<sup>22</sup> and John T. Flynn,<sup>23</sup> Colcord's personal evolution and worldview as an isolationist have been woefully neglected. Only his role in the 1939-41 debate over American entry into the war in Europe has featured in a smattering of recent histories.<sup>24</sup> His activities during the foreign policy debate of the 1930s, however, work which earned him citations in some of the most prominent isolationist monographs of the period, have been almost totally neglected by modern historians.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, no less an authority than Justus Doenecke has noted this deficit, singling out Colcord as one of many anti-interventionists of the journalistic

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the dissertation of David Lenarcic, "Where Angels Fear to Tread," and R. Douglas Francis, "Historical Perspectives on Britain: The Ideas of Canadian Historians Frank H. Underhill and Arthur R.M. Lower," in *Canada and the British World: Culture Migration and Identity*, edited by Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008). Berger, while covering much essential ground, is nevertheless brief, and thus overlooks much of the context, nuances, and even some whole elements of Lower's isolationist worldview. Most glaring is Berger's dating of Lower's isolationism to the mid-1930s, when in reality, Lower was publicly advocating for the position as early as the spring of 1933 and showing shades of it even earlier. For Lenarcic, Lower is only one of many characters in his massive study, and not one who played a significant role in the central focus of his research, the dilemma of Canada's legal right to neutrality as a Dominion of the British Commonwealth. Francis' piece is useful for its focus on Britain as an element of Lower's isolationism, but the main subject of the article is clearly Underhill, who gets a larger share of the author's attention. And as with Berger, Francis also drew only from Lower's published work.

<sup>20</sup> Justus Doenecke, "Edwin M. Borchard, John Bassett Moore, and Opposition to American Intervention in World War II," *Journal of Libertarian Studies* 6, No. 1 (1982), 1-34.

<sup>21</sup> Nicholas Pinchot, "Amos Pinchot: Rebel Prince," *Pennsylvania History* 66, No. 2 (Spring 1999), 166-98.

<sup>22</sup> Stephen Therstrom, "Oswald Garrison Villard and the Politics of Pacifism," *Harvard Library Bulletin* 14 (Winter 1960), 126-52. Michael Wreszin, *Oswald Garrison Villard: Pacifist at War* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1965).

<sup>23</sup> John Moser, *Right Turn: John Flynn and the Transformation of American Liberalism* (New York: NYU Press, 2005).

<sup>24</sup> Colcord's activism against Lend-Lease and revision of neutrality legislation during the year of 1941 comes up with some frequency in Justus D. Doenecke, *Storm on the Horizon* (2003), and a transcription of his letter to the head of the America First Committee is included in Doenecke's sourcebook for the organization, *In Danger Undaunted: The Anti-Interventionist Movement of 1940-41 as Revealed in the Papers of the America First Committee*, edited by Justus D. Doenecke, (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1990), 220-22. Colcord also has a biographical entry in a catalogue of prominent national-level isolationists and America First supporters, Bill Kauffman, "Who Were the America Firsters?" in Ruth Sarles, *A Story of America First: The Men and Women Who Opposed U.S. Intervention in World War II* (Westport, CN: Praeger, 2003), 185-86.

<sup>25</sup> Those references to Colcord can be found in Lothrop Stoddard, *Lonely America* (New York: Country Life Press, 1932), 255, 311-12, *The Neutrality Policy of the United States*, compiled by Julia E. Johnson, (New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1936), 184, and Edwin M. Borchard and William Lage, *Neutrality for the United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937), 298.

world in need of new and focused research.<sup>26</sup> That need, however, is as true for Arthur Lower as for Lincoln Colcord.

Through the 1930s, Colcord and Lower publicized their support for foreign policies centered on a unilateralism, neutrality, a limit but strictly prioritized national interest, and a potent fear of war. In addition to these broad principles, they were hostile to Britain through the 1930s as the most dangerous of all foreign connections. Both roundly denied Britain any measure of moral advantage over Germany, a country which neither saw as a direct threat to their own states. While both men shared a basic set of isolationist tenets, in each those impulses were essentially an extension of their nationalisms: one American, the other Canadian. The basic function of both their isolationisms was the same – to keep their countries out of war – and around this center were many additional shared principles. But at heart, they each had different ends based on their highest ideals for their respective countries. Lower's isolationism reflected his desire to draw Canada away from Britain's influence and become a more distinct, independent nation in its own right. Only by the act of choosing isolationism and neutrality, he argued, could Canada continue onward towards that goal. In this way, Lower made his isolationism part of a distinctly positive and constructive national project. Colcord's isolationism, by contrast, was more preventative. It was strongly connected to his contemporary drift to the right. Although he supported Franklin Roosevelt early on, by 1935 he had become a staunch enemy of the New Deal and the president's initiatives generally. FDR's foreign policy was only one area where Colcord stood in the opposition, but from 1937 on it was far and away the focus of his political efforts. At its deepest root, though, Colcord's isolationism was born out

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<sup>26</sup> Doenecke, Justus D. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History*. "Isolationism." Accessed 1 Oct. 2017. <http://americanhistory.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.001.0001/acrefore-9780199329175-e-49>.

his horrendous recollections of the Woodrow Wilson years – presidential deception of both the public and Colcord himself, political repression, and the disastrous settlement of 1919 that made the entire Great War so futile – and his determination not to see them repeated.

Colcord and Lower exemplify interwar isolationists as an ideological group within their respective countries. Through comparison they also illustrate how strikingly similar the two branches were even within their unique national forms. Although Lower came to the term far earlier than Colcord, both applied the label isolationist to their perspectives on world affairs and to themselves personally. They were aggressive and vocal promoters of a distinctly isolationist worldview, incessantly asserting their positions in public forums and private channels through the 1930s. Both held wide-ranging connections to like-minded isolationists and anti-interventionists in the professional world and the realm of politics; all advising, strategizing, and networking with one another through an intensive correspondence and direct meetings. For both men, taking a position as controversial and divisive as isolationism was well within their characters. They were habitual iconoclasts who challenged established dogmas and reigning authorities as a matter of course. As individual intellectuals, and as prominent members of larger isolationist currents in American and Canadian life, they consciously strove to shape the public minds of their nations. Capturing the drift of public opinion away from the surging wave of internationalism and British sympathy was the struggle they shared and the struggle they lost.

Although neither shied away from criticisms of their own countrymen, both Colcord and Lower were driven to isolationism by strongly protective visions for their homelands. Love of and fear for their nations in an era of ceaseless turmoil acted as their ideological fuel, inspiring confidence in the rightness of their views and steeling their will to assert them with vigor. Yet pressures to adapt, relent, and conform to ascendant internationalism came like an ever-rising

tide, putting the two men in the same dangerous corner. The decision they both faced – to defend or abandon their deeply held isolationist principles – was settled at different times and with different outcomes. By forces in world affairs, in the domestic scene, and by cumulative personal experience, one man reversed course, while the other held firm.

This is not a flaw in the comparison, but a valuable opportunity for understanding national differences between American and Canadian isolationism and cultures of the two countries. Arthur Lower was a nationalist before he was an isolationist. But during the 1930s, isolationism was not only essential to his nationalism, it was paramount. Isolationism for Lower was matter of national security and national interest, of national self-respect and national cohesion. If Canada could not stand for itself first and itself only, it did not count as a truly independent nation in his eyes. The English-Canadian connection to Britain was a plain and simple liability in Lower's estimation; culturally it was the biggest roadblock between Canada and potential national unity, politically it meant involvement in another world war, one whose likely outcome would be a Canadian civil war and the disintegration of the country.

Yet isolationism for Lower was not an end in itself, but rather a means to achieving his real goal; a more independent and self-validating Canadian nation. His transition away from isolationism and towards internationalism can be understood as the product of that constant aim. Lower's nation-building mentality, one which so enveloped him that it also fired his stark opposition to non-Anglo immigration, was not the pattern of his American counterpart. Lincoln Colcord's nation was one that already existed, but also one which he felt was under constant threat through the years of Franklin Roosevelt's presidency; first, by the policies of the New Deal, and second, from the negative domestic and global effects of American participation in another world war.



The core of this project is to explore isolationism as an ideology of North American themes and national variations. Comparing an American and a Canadian example of this mindset also brings a broader perspective to a subject too commonly associated with the United States alone. The parallels between Colcord and Lower show that isolationist thinking was not an American possession, but that its reach extended to the other half of the continent as well. Lower's retreat from his isolationism at the outset of the Second World War, and Colcord's stalwart insistence on retaining his even after Pearl Harbor, ultimately reveals how isolationism as an ideology must be delineated by type and then measured by degrees.

## CHAPTER ONE

### LINCOLN COLCORD: EVANGELISM

#### Introduction

At his death in 1947, Lincoln Colcord left behind a story riven with irony. Here was a man born and raised at sea (in his elder years a nationally recognized authority on all things nautical), who never in his life owned a boat of his own. Here, too, was a prolific author of sea stories favorably compared with those of Jack London and Joseph Conrad, who published the first of them while working as a civil engineer deep in the woods of Maine.<sup>1</sup> And here was a man who dedicated the whole of his career to letters of all kinds – fiction and poetry, history and biography, rigorous journalism and open polemics – but whose grave stone bears no epitaph. Even stronger contradictions are to be found in Colcord's politics. During the two years of American involvement in the First World War he was, by his own account, "among the staunchest advocates of Mr. Wilson's liberalism."<sup>2</sup> At the war's bitterly unsatisfying conclusion, he morphed into an openly anti-Wilson, pro-Bolshevik radical. The pattern repeated just over a decade later. In the opening years of Franklin Roosevelt's presidency, he embraced the new administration and supported its New Deal. By 1935, he was a vicious opponent of both.

Yet through the four decades of his public life, Lincoln Colcord's political identity was strikingly consistent. He defined himself as a "liberal," an eternally ambiguous label that becomes even murkier in his individual case.<sup>3</sup> He was a liberal when he supported Woodrow

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<sup>1</sup> In a cover story for *Collier's* magazine, Colcord clarified his own preference between those two popular authors. "Jack London's sea stories are all false – and rot besides. Joseph Conrad, of course, has written truly of the sea..." Lincoln Colcord, "Landlubbers and Ships," *Collier's* 59, No. 26 (September 1917), 6.

<sup>2</sup> Lincoln Colcord, "Proposing a Return to Lawlessness," *New York Herald Tribune* (February 19, 1937).

<sup>3</sup> At least for the period before 1919, Colcord's liberalism was objectively closer to the progressivism of the era that bears its name, but "liberal" was the term he used to describe himself and his outlook even then. Alan Dawley notes that the two terms were often used interchangeably at that time, but the essential "quarrel" between the two in both

Wilson in 1917 and 1918, and after when he relentlessly condemned the president's foreign policy and championed the cause of the young Soviet Union. Likewise, he was a liberal when he supported Franklin Roosevelt during the first two years of his presidency, and after when he denounced the New Deal and effectively realigned himself with the Republican Party.

In the broad view, Colcord's strain of American liberalism had several basic components: intellectual tolerance, a suspicion of centralized authority, a distaste for bureaucracy, and an insatiable impulse to criticize established ways, leaders, and institutions.<sup>4</sup> These, however, were only the practical benchmarks of his liberal worldview. At its deepest foundation was a sweeping vision – of society purged of its selfish vices and archaic inefficiencies, of a universal “brotherhood of man” to replace violent national competition, of the whole world broken down and made anew.<sup>5</sup> As a young man immersed in the Washington, D.C.-scene at the crest of World War I, he bubbled over with this fiery idealism. His dreams of national and global reconstruction were spurred on to impossible heights by the electrifying rhetoric of Woodrow Wilson and an intimate personal connection with Wilson's top aide, Edward House. But these hopes were gradually broken on the wheel by reality, and the ultimate legacy for Lincoln Colcord of Wilson,

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domestic and foreign affairs was over the principle of laissez-faire. The progressive instinct to “regulate” private interests at home naturally extended to the regulation of affairs between nations. Although Colcord's affinity for regulation was limited to curtailing monopoly power, he was in line with progressivism in reorganizing the international system. Alan Dawley, *Changing the World: American Progressives in War and Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 4-5.

<sup>4</sup> For an illustration, see Lincoln Colcord, “Appendix,” in John McConaughy, *Who Rules America? A Century of Invisible Government* (New York: Longmans, Green & Company, 1934), 318-19. Colcord helped edit the manuscript of this book for publication after its author's death in October of 1933.

<sup>5</sup> Colcord's case fits perfectly into the thesis of a recent survey of the American left-liberal tradition. At the basis of twentieth-century liberalism was a “coherent vision of progress,” an “idea of transformation” – embodied by socialism by not exclusively socialist – which “prodded [its adherents] onward” from one reform to the next. Doug Rossinow, *Visions of Progress: The Left-Liberal Tradition in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 11. Rossinow tags Colcord specifically as a “new liberal” of the ACLU-“laborite liberalism” variety. *Ibid.*, 85.

the Great War, and liberal internationalism were painful memories of futility and disillusionment.

Never did he forget the lesson. In the mid-1930s, with almost two decades of retrospect, Colcord saw the beating heart of his First World War-era mentality: “[the] question is,” he asked, “how badly do you want [the] reconstitution of society? Lib[eralism] to me was concrete and definite – [it] believed in [the] transition step to [a] new world... [but] few so-called lib[eral]s I have found are willing to face the logic of their own conclusions.”<sup>6</sup> Facing those conclusions – his own and his nation’s – determined his response to the events of that tumultuous new decade. “*Absit Omen!*” he cried in 1937, in an editorial blasting F.D.R.’s plan to expand the Supreme Court. “The search for the new, the faith in progress, the vision of the future, ends in tyranny!”<sup>7</sup>

Almost exactly twenty years earlier, in the spring of 1917, Colcord was totally devoted to just that search, that faith, and that vision. Despite an initial preference for the United States to remain out of the European war, his dedication to the possibility of a better postwar world and his confidence in Wilson to achieve it spurred a great change in his thinking. Responding to an overzealous patriot criticizing some of the young journalist’s suspiciously “pacifistic” newspaper editorials from before America joined the war, Colcord explained himself calmly:

I simply wanted to make a final expression of my liberalism before closing the door of my mind. The door is now closed. But if I admit that it will open again at a touch, I am not running counter to my convictions... I believe that there are always two everythings – two Englands, two Americas, as well as two Germanys – and two sides to every question. I even believe that there are two Doctor McConnells, and that the time may come when the other Doctor McConnell will think a good deal as I do. Unfortunately, however, there

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<sup>6</sup> These lines come a large bundle of handwritten notes almost certainly written around 1936, when Colcord was working on a book combining his experience during the First World War with a study of the relationship between Edward House and Woodrow Wilson. Colcord Family Archive [Hereafter CFA] Box 23 Folder 594 “Notes.”

<sup>7</sup> Lincoln Colcord, “Proposing a Return to Lawlessness,” *New York Herald Tribune* (February 19, 1937).

is a chance that we may still be at odds. By that time, I may have shifted over to the side of the other me.<sup>8</sup>

Even in these, the headiest days of his youth, the singular moment when his soul was most captivated by idealism, Lincoln Colcord recognized his own nature and predicted his own future. There were two Lincoln Colcords – one of liberalism and another of conservatism, one of internationalism and another of nationalism, one dedicated to the prospect of a new world and another desperate to preserve his own world as it was. There were two Lincoln Colcords, and there could have been never have been one without the other.

Lincoln Colcord the isolationist was reared upon the grave of Lincoln Colcord the Wilsonian internationalist. He recognized the transition himself. In 1941, another struggle was under way to decide America's course between peace and war, isolation and international engagement. William C. Bullitt, Colcord's closest journalistic colleague during the First World War but more recently FDR's ambassador to France, put himself on the latter side of that struggle. In setting himself against this old friend – a man whose cycle of infatuation and disillusionment with Wilson ran strikingly close to his own<sup>9</sup> – Colcord for the first time identified himself as an isolationist, and explained with clarity the deeply personal basis of that worldview.

Bill Bullitt's speech certainly was dreadful, but I really thought it overreached itself. He got off one line that made me laugh. He said: 'Isolationists are those who love the past of America, which is dead.' Leaving aside the question of whether it is dead or not, a more correct definition couldn't be uttered. That is exactly what I am – an isolationist, because I love the past of America. And dead or not, the principles on which it is based are eternal. If they are dying or dead, they will arise again.

How strange, sad, and significant that a fellow like Bill could say such a thing, and look at it with entirely different eyes from yours and mine. To him, if the past is dead, to hell with it – we will make a new world... Well, we only have to learn once more that

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<sup>8</sup> Lincoln Colcord, "Mr. Colcord Makes Answer," *Philadelphia Public Ledger* [Hereafter **PPL**] (April 14, 1917).

<sup>9</sup> For the details, see Michael Cassella-Blackburn, *The Donkey, the Carrot, and the Club: William Bullitt and Soviet-American Relations, 1917-1948* (Westport, CN: Praeger, 2004).

everything ‘new’ is old as the hills, and that it’s all been tried over and over again by deluded people suffering the same dream. The shocking thing, of course, is that we ourselves tried it and failed only twenty-five years ago.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Undercurrent, 1883-1916**

Lincoln Colcord’s unique childhood foreshadowed the unique course of his adult life. Indeed, Colcord himself recognized its supreme importance to his identity and his reputation. While he never wrote a full autobiography, he did produce an article-length memoir of his birth and formative years for public consumption. Its title, “I Was Born in a Storm at Sea,” points to the heart of his experience.<sup>11</sup> He was born at sea on August 14, 1883, during a midwinter storm off the east coast of Cape Horn. The birth occurred in the cabin of the *Charlotte A. Littlefield*, a 548-ton Bangor-built bark on the return leg of a two-year voyage to Australia, Japan, and Chile. The master of that bark was Lincoln Alden Colcord, father of the newborn and of another child born at sea the previous year, Joanna. For most of the next fourteen years of his life, the younger Lincoln was raised on the water, travelling with his parents from New York and Boston to ports of call around the world – up and down both coasts of South America, to the Pacific Northwest of the United States, through the maze of the East Indian islands toward Singapore, and most important of all, along the coast of China between Hong Kong and Shanghai.<sup>12</sup>

The six earth-spanning voyages of Lincoln Colcord’s youth, all made aboard sailing ships captained by his father and most running two years in duration, were the foundation of his entire life. But while he loved and prized his seaborne childhood, he knew early on that it was a way of

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<sup>10</sup> Lincoln Colcord [hereafter **LC**] to Oswald Garrison Villard, March 3, 1941. Privately Held. Courtesy of Professor Parker Albee, Falmouth, Maine.

<sup>11</sup> Lincoln Colcord, “I Was Born in a Storm at Sea,” *The American Magazine* 96, No. 1 (July 1923), 19, 74-80. Reprinted in Lincoln Colcord, *Sea Stories from Searsport to Singapore*, edited by Donald Mortland, (Thorndike, ME.: North Country Press, 1987), 175-90.

<sup>12</sup> A beautiful and comprehensive account of these voyages can be found in Parker Bishop Albee, Jr., *Letters from Sea, 1882-1901: Joanna and Lincoln Colcord’s Seafaring Childhood* (Gardiner, ME.: Tilbury House and Searsport, ME.: Penobscot Marine Museum, 1991), a reprinting of dozens of letters written between Colcord, his sister, and their parents that were compiled by Colcord himself not long after his father’s death.

life in terminal decline. In a very real sense, Lincoln Colcord was born and raised on an anachronism. The 1880s and 90s were the waning days of deep-water sailing ships. After the turn of the next century they were comprehensively replaced by motor-powered, steel-hulled vessels under the ownership of massive corporations. Fittingly, this moment of transition in maritime trade was when young Colcord left the sea for good. In 1897, his parents settled him in Maine to begin his education ashore. After graduating from high school in 1900, he enrolled in the University of Maine in Orono to pursue a degree in engineering.<sup>13</sup>

In retrospect, Colcord described this new phase of his life with dreamy sadness. A boy of his “upbringing,” he wrote, “didn’t properly fit in anywhere. I left my heart moored, I think, in the fairway of the Straits of Sunda, the gateway of the East... I have a notion that it will never drift ashore.”<sup>14</sup> During his traumatic years in Orono, however, he used much harsher language to describe the shock.<sup>15</sup> A life of writing was Colcord’s only satisfying alternative to the impossible life of the sea. He discovered it early in his time at college, but only through much struggle did he bring it to fruition. He dropped out in 1906 to work with the Bangor & Aroostook Railroad as a field engineer and remained there until 1908, the year he sold his first short story and dedicated himself full time to literature. Over the next seven years – the same period in which he would marry his first wife, Blanche M. Nickels; have his first child, a daughter Inez; and settle himself in his father’s ancestral house in Searsport, Maine – Colcord would publish more than a dozen

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<sup>13</sup> These details can be found in a useful biographical essay by Donald Mortland, “Lincoln Colcord: At Sea and at Home,” *Colby Quarterly* 19, No. 3 (September 1983), 125-43.

<sup>14</sup> Colcord, “I Was Born in a Storm at Sea,” in *Sea Stories*, 189.

<sup>15</sup> In 1905, Colcord confronted his father for about life he and his sister were forced to live at sea; “did you ever think what abnormal lives we both had, up to the time we went to college... I have thought of that a lot; it was the wrench from that abnormal life to the normal that I seem to be living now, that took so much of my time and thought when you left me at home. It was the best training in the world to make a thinker, but it absolutely destroyed my claims to naturalness, my human side.” LC to Lincoln Alden Colcord, August 11, 1905, CFA Box 74 Folder 1264.

stories in some of the major illustrated magazines of the era, a full-length novel in 1912, *The Drifting Diamond*, and a compilation of his best stories in 1914, *The Game of Life and Death*.<sup>16</sup>

His fiction was generally well received, earning special accolades for his vivid portrayals of China and the Chinese. His publisher, Macmillan of New York, recognized this from the start of their relationship with the promising young author. Macmillan's chairman, George Brett, cited *The Drifting Diamond*'s stirring depiction of "the Eastern attitude as opposed to the Western attitude in regard to things both material and of the mind" as one of the strong points of the book.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Colcord used an enigmatic Chinese gentleman – Lee Fu Chang, a man of seemingly infinite wisdom, wit, and stoic poise – as one of his most frequent characters and an obvious outlet for his own voice.

In his memoir-article, Colcord made it clear that his birth did not affect his nationality. "The question of citizenship involved in birth at sea," he wrote, was a simple one to answer. He was as American as "children born in American embassies abroad... I am far from being a man without a country."<sup>18</sup> But even so, his personal identity was not at all attached to the world he was left to mature in. Years would pass before Colcord allowed either Maine or the United States itself into the center of his personal spirit. On the contrary, coursing through the first decade of his fiction writing was an open hostility toward American society – particularly its materialism – and a glowing admiration for the society of China as its antithesis.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Mortland, "Lincoln Colcord: At Sea and at Home," *Colby Quarterly*.

<sup>17</sup> George P. Brett to LC, October 22, 1912, CFA Box 12 File 266.

<sup>18</sup> Colcord, "I Was Born in a Storm at Sea," in *Sea Stories*, 178.

<sup>19</sup> One story in particular – first published in 1922 but written in 1915 – illustrates this theme clearly. In it, a "Chinese sage" debates an American visiting China on the ideal of "progress." Under serene but exacting scrutiny, the sage coaxes his guest to admit that America's sole measures of progress are the advance of technology and the increase of wealth. In China, "five thousand years of uninterrupted history" revealed that only "spiritual increase is the true advance." Lincoln Colcord, "Conversation in a Garden," *The Freeman* 5, No. 123 (July 19, 1922), 443-45.



So powerful was this undercurrent in Colcord's thought that at one point it slipped above the surface. In an open letter to *The American Magazine* (the same periodical from which he drew the lion's share of his income) Colcord revealed his inner distance from his country in startlingly frank terms. The letter was ostensibly a reaction to the recent Chinese Revolution, the overthrow of the 400-year old Qing dynasty and the founding of a Republic of China. But Colcord was beyond enthralled by that faraway upheaval. "The most wonderful transformation in the world is going on there. I want to more than see it; I want to be a part of it. China is my real home, the Chinese are my native people; in this grim land, I've always been an alien."

China will not take up with the West as Japan has done. The problem is a deeper one... Yuan [Shikai, second President of the Republic] is a wonderful man; the future will show how sincere he is. Is he the Sage, too, I wonder, that China needs more than the Administrator? Is he a *superior* man, according to Confucius? Will he be the Prophet of China, as well as her savior – the Chinese Charlemagne? Such a man, with powers, in a reign of thirty or forty years, could accomplish the transformation of a quarter of the population of the world!... The result, I think and have always thought, is inevitable; the supremacy of the yellow man over the white. Such a statement sounds incredible; but stranger things have taken place in history. Imagine yourself for a moment the editor of a Roman magazine, and myself a struggling author in the palmy days of Rome. These Goths, these Teutonic tribes – I write you from a northern province – they must be reckoned with. And you, perhaps, lean back sumptuously in your editorium, and smile as your eye follows the line of skyscrapers along the Tiber. Well, it won't happen in the old way, surly; the time of fighting, razing, burning has gone by. But if the *yellow race is superior to the white race*, it will happen – perhaps in a way so new that it has never yet been seen.<sup>20</sup>

Written several months before the final revisions of Colcord's novel and eight months before its actual publication, it is unlikely that this letter was just a sales-boosting publicity stunt. Rather, it was a logical (if extreme) extension of the dominant sentiment in his fiction. Colcord was venting a feeling of alienation from the United States and American society that went to the very core of his being. Moreover, the letter revealed another vital aspect of this self-distancing from the world around him. Colcord's vision in his letter was one of radical upheaval, and of

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<sup>20</sup> Lincoln Colcord, "An American Who Believes in the Superiority of the Yellow Race," *The American Magazine* 73, No. 4 (February 1912), 507. Emphasis in the original.

great social-political overturns that would inevitably follow in its wake. In 1912, it was only in his wildest fantasies that he could ever be part of such a thing. But in years soon to come, the door was opened wide to just the sort of titanic change that he craved to see with his own eyes.

The outbreak of war in Europe in August 1914 captivated Colcord as nothing had before. Although he continued to publish short stories into 1915, his output of fiction dwindled to nothing by the end of that year. The great conflict overseas became the focus of his literary work. It demanded a response, and respond he did through the fall and into the summer of the following year. The final product – published in October 1915 but with the bulk of the original manuscript sent to Macmillan in December 1914 – was *Vision of War*, a 149-page epic poem written in free verse *à la* Walt Whitman.<sup>21</sup> The poem received high praise from some quarters, with the most glowing review of all coming from William Stanley Braithwaite of the influential *Boston Evening Transcript* who declared it “the most important piece of literature of the year.”<sup>22</sup> Less sympathetic reviewers, however, found much to criticize in its incendiary core theme, the spiritual power of war to purge society of its materialism and selfishness.<sup>23</sup> Colcord gave ample evidence for this throughout the poem, such as this verse out of the sixth canto:

The actual fighting is not of the least importance;  
The killing and being killed are not worth talking about;  
The willingness to be killed is the only vital issue;  
The spirit of war is its only argument.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> George P. Brett to LC, December 17, 1914, CFA Box 12 Folder 266. Colcord sent the manuscript to New York via his sister Joanna, whom he also relied on for help revising it.

<sup>22</sup> William Stanley Braithwaite, “A Modern Poet’s Vision of War,” *Boston Evening Transcript* (October 9, 1915).

<sup>23</sup> A belief in the socially rejuvenating qualities of war was a genuine phenomenon among middle- and upper-class Americans at the turn-of-the-twentieth century. For an overview, see chapter 3, “The Destructive Element: Modern Commercial Society and the Martial Ideal” in T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 98-139.

<sup>24</sup> Lincoln Colcord, *Vision of War* (New York: Macmillan, 1915), 39-42.

But there was a singular purpose for all this killing in Colcord's scheme, one far more monumental than spiritual purification alone. The pain, destruction, and death of the Great War would set the world on fire, but out of the flames would come a new and better world unified by its suffering and dedicated to peace and conciliation. Writing twenty years after the poem's publication, he could be perfectly frank about his original intent. "[It] was more or less a philosophical celebration of war in the midst of a semi-barbarous world, as a means of getting things ironed out and working forward to an ultimate civilization."<sup>25</sup> Although he used other names in the poem itself – the "Democracy of the World," the "Republic of Humanity," the "Brotherhood of Man" – he illustrated that ultimate vision at length in the second canto:

Spirit exalted! Above the armies of men in battle it hovers, valorous, undefiled;  
 There, on the field of carnage and death, stand forth the highest instincts of the soul;  
 There find ye courage, strength, nobility, ungrudging service;  
 There find ye infinite tenderness and compassion, the generosity of worthy foemen;  
 ...  
 There near-appearing, the dream that stood far off in times of peace;  
 Love without bound, love compassing the enemy and friend alike;  
 Unselfish love, a flash of the ideal;  
 Love of humanity – the Brotherhood of Man!<sup>26</sup>

Colcord's response to his critics at the time did not deny their accusations that he idealized the struggle of war. He could not, of course. Instead, he pointed them in another direction. "The war is making us all over," Colcord said in a long interview with Braithwaite, "showing us our true relations and purposes, clearing up our minds." The greatest benefit Americans could reap from the European war was to realize a fundamental truth of human

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<sup>25</sup> LC to Edwin Borchard, June 10, 1937, CFA Box 7 Folder 97.

<sup>26</sup> Colcord, *Vision of War*, 24-26.

nature. “I do not believe that England or France or America are purely democratic and Germany purely autocratic... The two [democracy and autocracy] cannot be separated. One isn’t right and the other wrong. Both are tightly interwoven in the heart of man.” Thus “the real issue in this great war” was not a moral one, but a struggle for “mutual enlightenment” between “the two contending groups.” Colcord elaborated:

How much democracy – the democracy which she once had, but has now thrown overboard – is Germany to relearn from the Allies? How much autocracy – true autocracy, of the sort which we once had in good measure [Colcord refers here to the kind of meritocratic hierarchy embodied in the social order on sailing ships], but have now pretty generally thrown overboard – are we and the Allies to relearn from Germany? Let us attend to our high part in the matter, which is not to teach, but to learn.<sup>27</sup>

That subtle metaphor of “learning” rather than “teaching” was no doubt meant to indicate his position on American involvement in the war. In verse, Colcord exalted the spirit of war to the limit, although he painstakingly debunked any supposed moral high ground of the principle belligerents in the conflict – including Germany, England, and even Belgium.<sup>28</sup> But in prose, by contrast, his judgement leaned decisively towards non-intervention for his own country.

In a June 1915 letter to the *New Republic* he excoriated the Wilson administration for the “absurd and evil censorship” of its diplomatic correspondence with Japan and China. “The fact of the matter,” he wrote, “is that, from the first, public opinion in the United States was determined to hold aloof from any entanglements with the European war; and this state of mind was so widespread and made itself so evident that there could be no question of its sound and permanent quality.” It was full awareness of the realities abroad that had kept Americans from

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<sup>27</sup> William Stanley Braithwaite, “The War Finds a Real Poet at Last,” *Boston Evening Transcript* (March 15, 1916).

<sup>28</sup> Most of these critiques centered on chiding the belligerents for their current and historical imperialism; for instance, Belgium for “tainting the spirit of the whole world” through its Congo atrocities, Britain for crying “wrong of conquest” against Germany when it was a “born arch-conqueror,” Japan for Westernizing with the malevolent intent of using technological advantage to seize territory from China. Colcord, *Vision of War*, 82, 89, 101.

becoming “embroiled” thus far. Losing access to that reality risked fomenting the “jealousy, suspicion, apprehension, or other influences which make for war.”<sup>29</sup>

Although he never referred back to it as a watershed in his intellectual development, this brief piece was, in effect, the seminal expression of the same isolationist impulse that would totally dominate his political priorities two decades into the future. Indeed, the distinctive language of the letter was the direct antecedent of his anti-interventionist writing through the decade before Pearl Harbor. It was one of many tragedies in Lincoln Colcord’s life that in the nearer term this deep-seated isolationist impulse was subsumed by another, much stronger one – the dream of a new world.

Colcord’s letter followed the anti-interventionist editorial line of the *New Republic*, then less than a year old but fast becoming a major voice for American liberal opinion.<sup>30</sup> Although he declined a formal role in the magazine offered by one of its editors, over the next two years he did publish a number of poems, letters, and several articles as a freelancer.<sup>31</sup> The first and most important of those articles was “The Truer Germany,” a commentary on the “change in German thought from internationalism to nationalism.” Colcord’s reading of German history led him to “a single disquieting conclusion: the world persistently refused to leave Germany alone,” thus forcing a people once known for their “broad and tolerant internationalism” to “develop power” for the sake of their own survival. In this way, “scoring the cloak of hypocrisy, and feeling no

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<sup>29</sup> Lincoln Colcord, “Making Diplomatic Correspondence Public,” *New Republic* 3, No. 31 (June 5, 1915), 124-25.

<sup>30</sup> Christopher Nichols notes that the *New Republic* in the opening years of the war promoted a peculiar balance of isolationism and internationalism, calling for the United States to preserve its neutrality while also encouraging it to exert its national influence to bring about peace in Europe. Christopher McKnight Nichols, *Promise and Peril: America at the Dawn of a Global Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 127-29.

<sup>31</sup> In December 1914, after reading a letter of his views on the war forwarded from George Brett, Herbert Croly personally approached Colcord about having him “on our list as a permanent, and more or less regular, contributor.” Herbert Croly to LC, December 7, 1914, CFA Box 9 Folder 139.

sentimental drawbacks,” its “power for defense was easily and naturally metamorphosed into power for conquest.”<sup>32</sup>

But despite this brutal reality, Colcord still did not take a side in the European conflict and favored a “drawn campaign” as the best possible outcome. Presaging the famous phrase “peace without victory” – coined in the *New Republic* in December 1916 and taken up by Woodrow Wilson in January 1917 – he warned that “[a]n absolute defeat on the one hand means an absolute victory on the other; and history proves that nothing is more potentially dangerous than an absolute victory... such a victory could easily become disastrous to humanity at large.” “If there is ever to be a sound peace,” he concluded, “faith in the true Germany must be the chief article of the terms,” just as “Germany’s mission, if she is to have a mission, must be to teach nations how to leave each other alone and how to govern themselves at home.”<sup>33</sup>

It was this provocative article, according to historian John Reinertson, that first brought Lincoln Colcord to the attention of Colonel Edward M. House.<sup>34</sup> A Texan by birth but with primary residences in New York City and Massachusetts, by 1915 the independently wealthy former politician was the closest single advisor to President Woodrow Wilson despite holding no

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<sup>32</sup> Lincoln Colcord, “The Truer Germany,” *The New Republic* 3, No. 38 (July 24, 1915), 309-10.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 310-11.

<sup>34</sup> John Reinertson, “Colonel House, Woodrow Wilson and European Socialism 1917-1919,” (PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1971), 161. It bears noting that Reinertson offers no citation for this claim, but he is due credibility for his extremely intensive work with House’s papers (at Yale) and Colcord’s (then in the possession of his son, Brooks Colcord). Christopher Lasch, the first of the handful of historians to work directly with Colcord’s papers, simply states that “House and Colcord seem to have met in 1916, possibly somewhat earlier.” *The New Radicalism in America: The Intellectual as a Social Type* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), 234. Unrecognized by either historian, though, was the potential connection by way of Colcord’s nephew on his wife’s side, Clifford Nickels Carver. The Princeton grad and scion of a major New York City ship chandlery was recruited by Edward House in mid-1915 from the staff of Walter Hines Page, the American Ambassador to Britain, to serve as House’s secretary and “personal agent” on his European diplomatic tour of that year. Charles Neu, *Colonel House: A Biography of Woodrow Wilson’s Silent Partner* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 191.

official post in the administration. But even without a title, House was a man of real power, a fact that Colcord would directly benefit from as the two grew closer.

In late 1916, it was House who paved the way for Colcord to join the Philadelphia *Public Ledger*, a traditionally Republican newspaper whose owner, Cyrus Curtis, and editor, H.B. Brougham, were collaborating with both House and Wilson himself to realign with the Democratic administration.<sup>35</sup> House initially pushed for the paper to send Colcord to Europe. There he could serve as both its overseas correspondent and as one of House's unofficial "agents" monitoring European affairs and building connections with European liberals.<sup>36</sup> In the end, rising U.S.-German tensions in early 1917 forced Colcord's impromptu reassignment to Washington, D.C.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, the prelude to the original scheme involved Colonel House mailing a copy of "The Truer Germany" and an advance proof of his latest *New Republic* piece directly to the president for vetting.<sup>38</sup> "Colcord is a man of fine integrity," House testified to his chief in the accompanying letter; "[he] is a progressive and an ardent admirer of yours. He is, I think, the best man we could have to make a start in the direction planned."<sup>39</sup>

In a broader context, Colcord was but one man in a wide circle of liberal journalists whom Edward House gathered around himself. Walter Lippmann and Herbert Croly of the *New*

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<sup>35</sup> Woodrow Wilson to Herbert Bruce Brougham, December 15, 1916, in *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson* Volume 40 November 20, 1916-January 23, 1917, Arthur S. Link, ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), 243.

<sup>36</sup> Godfrey Hogson, *Woodrow Wilson's Right Hand: The Life of Colonel Edward M. House* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 106, 171. "Lincoln Colcord Going to Germany," *Bangor Daily News* (January 22, 1917).

<sup>37</sup> "Bernsdorff and Colcord," *The Editor and Publisher* 49, No. 38 (March 3, 1917), 6.

<sup>38</sup> Lincoln Colcord, "The United States as a Sea Power," *New Republic* 9, No. 113 (December 30, 1916), 240-42. That Wilson received an advance proof of this article comes out of a letter from Colcord's editor to the White House Usher, attempting to arrange a meeting with the president. "...[C]ertification from the President of his [Colcord's] singular fitness and ability for this mission and of his personal character, as well as the President's commendation of the enterprise itself, would convey to the public the necessary note of distinction and credibility." Herbert Bruce Brougham to Ira Hood Hoover, January 1, 1917, in *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson* Volume 40, 380-81.

<sup>39</sup> Edward Mandell House to Woodrow Wilson, December 31, 1916, in *ibid.*, 374.

*Republic*, William C. Bullitt of the *Public Ledger*, Frank Cobb and Herbert Bayard Swope of the *New York World*, David Lawrence of the *New York Evening Post*, Ray Stannard Baker, and Raymond Swing were among the other members of House's informal clique. "Together," writes Christopher Lasch, "they constituted a personal following, all of them dedicated to the Colonel, all of them convinced that he represented the pinnacle of political wisdom and convinced, moreover, that his views were those of the administration as a whole." As willing accessories to a colossal "publicity" project for shoring up American opinion behind the president before and after the United States joined the war, "[i]t was through their innocent efforts, in part, that the liberal public was so long deceived about the real direction of Wilson's foreign policy."<sup>40</sup>

But Colcord was more than just another of House's agents, and likewise, House was more than just a convenient patron whose support could be parleyed into a successful career in journalism. In many respects, the two were made for each other. All through the years leading up to 1916, Colcord was intensely interested in the spiritual decay of American society and the need for bold, sweeping change to remedy it. And as was suggested by his 1912 letter hailing Yuan Shikai, Colcord was also in search of a great man to follow into a brighter future. Such a man – a "Man of God," as he wrote in an April 1916 article titled "Religious Democracy" – would necessarily stand "outside" the organizations of the status quo to cultivate the "prophetic spirit of [his] ministry." An "outright and uncompromising idealist," he would challenge the "majority" to break their complacency, shun the "conventions of materialism," and ultimately, shake "the very foundations of the established order."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Lasch, *The New Radicalism*, 234-35. David McFadden notes that, in fact, House's full circle spread much wider than mainstream liberal journalists like Colcord and Lippmann. It also included outright leftists and socialists like Lincoln Steffens, Max Eastman, Albert Rhys Williams, Bessie Beatty, and John Reed. David W. McFadden, *Alternative Paths: Soviets and Americans, 1917-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 43.

<sup>41</sup> Lincoln Colcord, "Religious Democracy," *The Forum* (April 1916), 385-97.



Colcord believed he found that man in Edward House. Indeed, such was the magnitude of his respect for the Colonel, that in special, confidential correspondence with his editor in 1917 Colcord sometimes gave him the alias “Lee Fu,” the name of the infallible Chinese sage from his now dormant fiction.<sup>42</sup> So much trust did House place in his acolyte in turn, that he revealed to him a fact which, according to Reinertson, he scrupulously “sought to conceal.” House admitted that he was the author of an anonymous 1912 novel – *Philip Dru: Administrator* – the story of a mysterious bureaucrat who seizes power over a corrupt and unstable United States after a second civil war in order to reform it under his absolute, all-knowing authority.<sup>43</sup>

In his thorough study of the relationship between these two unique men, Christopher Lasch found them mutually captivated by “the politics of fantasy.” House could not afford to show it in his public life as Colcord did, but in the fictional world of *Philip Dru* and in private conversation with the idealistic young writer, he revealed that there was another man beneath his placid façade of subordination to the president. His “daydreams,” writes Lasch, “were dreams of subversion and civil strife,” prompted by “a fierce resentment” against American society and all its faults. With Lincoln Colcord, House found a man of similar bent. His dreams, too, were dominated by “apocalyptic” change, and particularly the conviction that the current war would be “the cataclysm from which the brave new world would arise.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> This small detail comes by way of Reinertson, who apparently overlooked the name’s tremendous significance. “Colonel House, Woodrow Wilson and European Socialism 1917-1919,” 164.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 41, 80n4. Lasch also notes this, placing the date of the revelation in June 1917 as part of “an extraordinary series of recollections and prophecies” in which House made the following promise, as recorded in Colcord’s diary: “‘If I see that the Peace conference is going wrong... I have made up my mind to throw my whole career into the balance, to tell what I know, to have all the cards out on the table, to kick up a rumpus that will ring from end to end of the world... I will turn socialist, even anarchist, overnight.’” And Colcord’s reply: “‘I hope it will not need to happen, sir... But perhaps it might be the best way, too. I would like to be with you on such a program. You don’t realize, perhaps, that you could not possibly fail – that your triumph would be complete and absolute, and that you would appear before the people as the great religious figure of the times.’” Lasch, *The New Radicalism*, 241-43.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 227, 233, 237.

It was initially through House that Colcord built up his faith in Wilson to bring that world to fruition. Before 1917, he took a dispassionate view of the president and his foreign policy. He had certainly warmed to Wilson since his scathing June 1915 letter to the *New Republic*. Yet in a letter to his mother written just days after the 1916 election, he admitted that while he voted to reelect the president, he did so on the rather simple grounds that “it would have been a great mistake to change just now – and I didn’t like the way Hughes shaped besides.”<sup>45</sup> His December 1916 article in the *New Republic*, then, marks the real turning point in his perspective on Wilson.

It bears repeating that an advance proof of this article was sent by Edward House directly to the president. In light of Colcord’s ambivalence only a month earlier, its approving tone strongly suggests he had forewarning that Wilson might read it.<sup>46</sup> The crux of the piece was to heartily applaud Wilson’s policy of naval expansion short of rivaling Britain. “The present administration,” Colcord wrote, “seems to have aligned itself with the liberals on this question”; challenging British naval supremacy now would mean following the recent path of Germany, “a voyage which leads nowhere but to defeat or imperialism.” But while he validated Wilson’s acquiescence in Britain’s frankly “reactionary” wartime sea policies, he also insisted that out of the inevitable peace must come fundamental change; “a new and more liberal order of internationalism, whereby vital matters may be settled without resort to arms.”<sup>47</sup>

With this last line, Colcord was decisively aligning himself with the president. Before and after 1917, such a global reconstruction laid at the center of Wilson’s scheme for the postwar

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<sup>45</sup> LC to Jane French Sweetser Colcord, November 13, 1916, CFA Box 65 Folder 1167a. Notably, he also reacted with coolness to the recent sinking of an American merchant ship by a German submarine, asking aloud “I don’t see why they haven’t a right to sink her, if they see that the crew gets saved.”

<sup>46</sup> It should also be noted that the article coincided with the *New Republic*’s own editorial shift “from a spirit of preparedness to one of all-out armament” in late 1916. Nichols, *Promise and Peril*, 148.

<sup>47</sup> Colcord, “The United States as a Sea Power,” 241-42.

world.<sup>48</sup> But all the same, Colcord was also asserting a war aim of his own. His “new order” of 1916 was basically the “sound peace” he called for in 1915 in “The Truer Germany.” His hopes for fulfilling that dream had not abated, but were primed to rise exponentially. For the previous two years, he had tackled the war in Europe with earnestness and wild idealism, captivated by visions seismic change at home and abroad. In the year to come, he would choose to submerge himself even more completely in the greatest political currents of the time.

### **Fair Winds and Foul, 1917-1918**

Colcord served as the Philadelphia *Public Ledger*’s Washington correspondent from January 1917 to the summer of 1918, although for most of 1917 he actually lived in New York City to be closer to his primary “source” within the Wilson administration, Colonel House.<sup>49</sup> Like the other journalists in his circle, House used Colcord as a vehicle for distributing his news and perspectives on Wilson, administration policy, and the war all through that period. In kind, Colcord was thus privilege to true insider information that made for invaluable newspaper stories.<sup>50</sup> Writing long in hindsight – and in the decade when his personal experience during the First World War was an essential part of his argument for isolationism – he had no qualms about

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<sup>48</sup> Indeed, historian Kurt Wimer notes that Wilson was so quickly captivated by the prospect of a “new international order” coming out of the European war that his fantasizing began within two weeks of its outbreak. Kurt Wimer, “Woodrow Wilson and World Order,” in *Woodrow Wilson and a Revolutionary World, 1913-1921*, Arthur S. Link ed. (Durham, NC: UNC Press, 1982), 150. Thomas Knock has a similar assessment. Wilson’s ambitions for international reform could be seen at the very outset of the war even when he was still dedicated to keeping the United States out of the European conflict. Thomas J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 33-34.

<sup>49</sup> Reinertson, “Colonel House, Woodrow Wilson and European Socialism 1917-1919,” 164-66.

<sup>50</sup> Writing to his editor about his latest scoop – that German Chancellor Bernsdorff was reaching out to liberals and socialists in the German Parliament – Colcord illustrated the singular importance of House to his journalism and the personal thrill he felt from the connection. “I had a strong dispatch ready to send this evening, but the Colonel wouldn’t let it go. We can have it later in the week, however... Anyway, we will be at the forefront of these news events; as a matter of fact, I have in a measure helped to hatch this news stroke, which ought to cut across the whole situation and appeal to the growing liberal forces in Germany.” LC to H.B. Brougham, May 20, 1917, CFA Box 23 Folder 526a. House apparently made up his mind quickly; the article was published the following day. Lincoln Colcord, “Liberalism Making Strides Among Germans,” *PPL* (May 21, 1917).

labeling himself “Colonel House’s mouthpiece in the press” during his Washington years.<sup>51</sup> But this jaundiced self-assessment did not do justice to his real journalism, nor to his real relationship with House. Christopher Lasch notes that Colcord had unusually frequent and close contact with House, seeing him multiple times per week through the winter and spring of 1917 and, by May, making daily visits to discuss his articles for the paper and their personal views of current events. This is indicative of a relationship based on more than convenience. Even with the inescapable factor of mutual self-interest, “there was,” Lasch writes, “for a time at least, a deeper bond as well, made firmer by Colcord’s unconcealed admiration.”<sup>52</sup>

Lincoln Colcord was indeed a relay man for the Colonel’s insider news and speculation. But in his actual reporting, his interpretations of that news were ultimately his own. And in any event, for the majority of 1917, he and House had a natural alignment on political issues and blended their individual perspectives virtually into one. Both men held a passionate desire to see a fundamentally “new world” born out of the European war. In more practical terms, they were united in their preference for a moderate, or “liberal,” peace to resolve the issues that created the war in the first place. They were also convinced that such a peace required the ascent of liberal or even socialist governments within Europe’s warring states.<sup>53</sup> Finally, and most importantly, they shared fantastically high expectations for Woodrow Wilson to carry that peace through at the war’s conclusion while laying its foundation as the conflict dragged on.

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<sup>51</sup> LC to Edwin Borchard, April 8, 1936, CFA Box 7 Folder 96.

<sup>52</sup> Lasch, *The New Radicalism*, 236. Other historians are in accord with Lasch’s assessment. Reinertson describes the two men as mentor and protégé, while Arthur S. Link writes that theirs was “something like a father-son relationship.” Reinertson, “Colonel House, Woodrow Wilson and European Socialism 1917-1919,” 160, 162. Arthur S. Link, *Woodrow Wilson and a Revolutionary World*, 130.

<sup>53</sup> Reinertson, “Colonel House, Woodrow Wilson and European Socialism 1917-1919,” 76-78, 88n67. Hodgson, *Woodrow Wilson’s Right Hand*, 104-05.

House's unique and powerful influence aside, Colcord found solid ground for his faith in Wilson early and on his own. The president's monumental address to Congress on January 22, 1917 – a speech best remembered for its two stirring demands from the warring powers: freedom of the seas and a peace without victory – stirred Colcord's spirit at the core. Even in his later, bitter days two decades after Wilson's failure to achieve those ends, he still granted that the January 22<sup>nd</sup> speech was an act of "real liberalism" to the president's credit, "a vision of the complete reformation of the Am[erican] gov[ernment] and of the world."<sup>54</sup> In Wilson's address, Colcord found mirrored several of his own vital convictions. The "revolutionary" proposal for freedom of the seas, while only applicable after the cessation of hostilities, promised nothing less than to "automatically do away with many of the direct causes themselves of the war."<sup>55</sup> Likewise, the "peace without victory" refrain revealed to Colcord Wilson's understanding that there could "no lasting peace without forgiveness and faith towards the enemy," and that out of the war must come a "new world" where "nations may rise or fall according to the measure of their energy and creative ability rather than by resort to arms."<sup>56</sup>

The German declaration of unrestricted submarine warfare at the start of February not only steeled Colcord's support for the president, it reaffirmed his overall view of the conflict. Since his 1915 "Truer Germany" article, Colcord believed that beneath imperial Germany's reigning "militarism" was a "liberal" essence that could reemerge and guide the country into the new international system Wilson was proposing. This perspective was shared by his mentor Edward House and the president himself in no uncertain terms.<sup>57</sup> Colcord thus sided with the

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<sup>54</sup> CFA Box 23 Folder 594 "Notes."

<sup>55</sup> Lincoln Colcord, "What Mr. Wilson Really Means By Freedom Of Seas," *PPL* (January 27, 1917).

<sup>56</sup> Lincoln Colcord, "'Peace Without Victory' Or 'Peace Without a Triumph,'" *PPL* (January 30, 1917).

<sup>57</sup> Ross Kennedy, *The Will to Believe: Woodrow Wilson, World War I, and America's Strategy for Peace and Security* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2009), 53, 57. Kennedy also notes, though, that after he took the United States into the war, this principle faded within Wilson's thinking as he fixated on rolling back Germany's

administration in his reaction to the submarine move. German militarism “betrayed” the president’s faith by rejecting his “concrete” proposal for “a moderate world peace.” Only change within Germany itself, getting “Liberal Germany firmly in the saddle” of government, offered hope for real progress in ending the war.<sup>58</sup>

After Wilson’s severing of diplomatic relations with Germany, Colcord grimly predicted his country’s future; “now America stands on the brink of war... [and i]f we enter the war we will have been forced into it by German junkerdom.” That perilous prospect, however, was not necessarily for the worse. Colcord had not forgotten his *Vision of War*. Now, that vision loomed on the real horizon. “War has a spiritual value whole equivalent has not yet been supplied in times of peace... a spiritual value whose profound reaction is plainly to be seen throughout Europe today. It may be that only through war can the true organization of human forces be accomplished. It may well be that America today needs war more than she knows.”<sup>59</sup>

Much as the fulfillment of this personal fantasy tempted him, Colcord was not yet converted to a true war mentality. He recognized that in Europe, the spirit of war had grown into a “Frankenstein’s monster” where “liberals tend to become conservatives, the rule of reason is threatened, and the passions of men are loosed in force and power.” America, too, had its “junkers” who relished the possibilities war opened for them. Even as peace persisted, Colcord saw all around him “the forces which make for war, which assume that war is inevitable, which will have war whether or no... They are the forces which, if war comes, will make the most of

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military gains. In Wilson’s evolving wartime strategy, this became the most important prerequisite for hammering out his ideal postwar peace settlement, and also a necessity for preserving the U.S. relationship with the Allies.

<sup>58</sup> Lincoln Colcord, “Germany’s Sudden Change of Front Shock to Wilson,” *PPL* (February 4, 1917). Colcord reiterated this position clearly just after Wilson’s declaration of war. Neither the United States nor the Allies could “treat with Germany until she has brought about a Government which will make her offers fair.” “Peace Offers From Germany Which Are No Offers At All,” *PPL* (April 8, 1917).

<sup>59</sup> Lincoln Colcord, “Danger of Junkerism Drawing U.S. Into War,” *PPL* (February 10, 1917).

patriotism. We must watch them closely then, lest we serve to contribute only another arm to the octopus of world junkerdom.” But concluding on a positive note, he encouraged his readers to be thankful for their national leadership. “It is well for us,” he wrote, “that we have in our chief post of authority one of the most uncompromising liberals the world has ever seen.”<sup>60</sup>

With a final line like that, it was little wonder that House took the initiative to send this article to the president for his opinion.<sup>61</sup> Replying to the Colonel, Wilson explicitly referred back to Colcord’s domestic fear and smoothly allayed it. He rejected the prospect of a “coalition” with “certain once hostile quarters” as merely “the *Junkerthum* trying to creep in under the cover of the patriotic feeling of the moment.” He assured his aide that “[t]hey will not get in... I know them too well, and will hit them straight between the eyes, if necessary, with plain words.”<sup>62</sup> Considering the frequency of Colcord’s visits to House and the closeness of their relationship, the contents of this letter must have reached the eager young journalist in good time. In this way, he would have had the most personal of guarantees that Woodrow Wilson was a man who could be trusted to stand firm on his liberal principles. In the year to come, as his initial confidence wavered in the face of new events, Colcord would need further (and more direct) confirmation from the president about his intent. But for the moment, his faith in Wilson was fixed.

His doubts about the war, however, lingered through weeks leading up to the United States’ official entry on April 2, 1917. In that brief interim period, Colcord held out hope for “a

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid. Colcord’s definition of “junker” shows the unmistakable influence of Progressive Era rhetoric. “The junker is the *reactionary*, the *conservative*, the hidebound *standpatter*, the rampant *imperialist*... In short, junkerism is nothing but the ancient and selfish creed of *special privilege*.” Emphasis added.

<sup>61</sup> Edward Mandell House to Woodrow Wilson, February 10, 1917, in *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson* Volume 41 *January 24-April 6, 1917*, Arthur S. Link, ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 190-91.

<sup>62</sup> Woodrow Wilson to Edward Mandell House, February 12, 1917, in *ibid.*, 201. Emphasis in the original. For confirmation that Wilson was indeed responding to Colcord’s article as opposed to other enclosures in House’s letter, see Alexander Sedlmaier, *Deutschlandbilder und Deutschlandpolitik: Studien zur Wilson-Administration, 1913-1921* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2003), 70, 70n214.

moderate victory and a moderate peace” without American involvement in the fighting.

“America has never felt that this was her war,” he wrote, harkening back to his anti-interventionist perspective of June 1915, and “no nation of the world had less part in the making of it,” a fact which “has stood solidly at the base of our neutrality.” Nevertheless, unbreakable economic and cultural connections between the old world and the new had played their part. “America little by little finds herself involved in the war.” As an alternative, though, Colcord favored a peace conference of belligerents and neutrals alike, one where the “staunch liberalism” of American representatives could “swing the balance in favor of a moderate course.”<sup>63</sup>

These deep-seated feelings did not disappear completely after April 2<sup>nd</sup>, but they did go dormant in favor an enthusiastically pro-war and pro-Wilson line. Three days into the war, Colcord endorsed wartime press censorship. His only plea was for it to be “a liberal censorship” dedicated to the policy that speech, and especially political speech, would “remain unhindered” except in cases obviously involving “military intelligence.”<sup>64</sup> The following week he endorsed conscription, then under debate in Congress. Dismissing fears that universal military service would allow “the specter of militarism” to infect American society, he argued that it was, in fact, spiritually superior to the “volunteer system.” Conscription, he wrote, “would only take us young and train us, more for the purposes of peace than of war. It would supply the gravest lack in American life – the lack of discipline, the lack of a respect for authority... [and also] the sober realization of the dangers and duties of war.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Lincoln Colcord, “Dual Organization For Peace Congress After Close of War,” *PPL* (March 15, 1917).

<sup>64</sup> Lincoln Colcord, “Shall American Censorship Be Military Or Civilian,” *PPL* (April 5, 1917).

<sup>65</sup> “The Bogey of Militarism,” *PPL* (April 14, 1917). Although this editorial ran unsigned, it can be found in Colcord’s personally compiled collection of his articles among his archival papers. CFA Box 19 Folder 503. Additionally, the argument for conscription here is an obvious outgrowth of Colcord’s old infatuation with the “spirit of war.”



In May, Colcord took his position to its logical conclusion. Americans were living at the dawn of a new era, he declared. They were realizing that “the world has changed overnight, that it has changed radically and irrevocably, that it can never again be the same world.” The “old gods” of “privilege and autocracy” were “falling from their pedestals” one by one. The “new gods” of the “new world” would be “co-ordinated government and centralization of executive power.” No longer could “the political sores of America” – the worst of which Colcord cited as Congress itself, corrupted by greed and dedicated to obstructing the president’s action – be left to fester; “they will soon need the surgeon and the knife.” That knife could be wielded by “one man” alone, for “the only force powerful enough to break down the new autocracy of wealth, to bridge the widening gulf between the classes, to restore freedom and liberty in their true definition as equality of opportunity, is the force of an unfettered elective authority.”<sup>66</sup>

This was the zenith of Lincoln Colcord’s public confidence in Woodrow Wilson. In this article, Wilson the president became nothing less than a total social panacea, a kind of domestic compliment to Wilson “the great Liberal” who was leading America out of its “isolation” and into a new role as the leader and protector of a “world-union of democracies.”<sup>67</sup> Although Colcord qualified that the office of the president had been given “too much power” already, he also admitted that the expansion of executive authority was a longstanding trend that “the people” themselves approved. So did he.<sup>68</sup> And lest this be read as the voice of House projected

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<sup>66</sup> Lincoln Colcord, “Every Stroke Of Action Now Cements President’s Power,” *PPL* (May 20, 1917).

<sup>67</sup> Lincoln Colcord, “Monroe Doctrine In New Interpretation As Foe To Autocracy,” *PPL* (April 16, 1917).

<sup>68</sup> Lincoln Colcord, “Every Stroke Of Action Now Cements President’s Power,” *PPL* (May 20, 1917). “The executive and legislative branches of any popular government should never be divided; the fact is the most obvious deduction of democratic experience... Twentieth-century democracy will recognize that man, the individual, is truly paramount, and will frankly and fearlessly subscribe to the practical policy of one-man control.”

through his acolyte, Colcord repeated exactly this sentiment in public just over a week later in a speech before the Academy of Political Science's National Conference on Foreign Relations.<sup>69</sup>

Much of that speech was shamelessly recycled from his *Public Ledger* articles, including the line he concluded on; that Americans were fortunate to have as their leader "one of the most uncompromising liberals the world has ever seen."<sup>70</sup> But one element was very different. As he saw before, "[o]ld gods are falling from their pedestals; new gods are rising on every hand." But now, two months after the abdication of the Russian Czar and the installation of a Provisional Government promising comprehensive social and political reforms, Colcord saw a new light in the east, a powerful omen for the new world being born.

Today Russia has spoken, and in her utterance gathers the whole significance of the war. Through the splendid Russian Revolution, the French Revolution has at last come into its own; and hand in hand with America, Russia now stands ready to take the next step onward for democracy... However it may be, I think there can be no doubt that, even if it were to fail for its own generation as did the French Revolution, history will mark the Russian Revolution as the end of our old era and the beginning of our new.<sup>71</sup>

If Woodrow Wilson was the great liberal statesman leading the way to the new world, revolutionary Russia was that world's spiritual harbinger. But at this point in the war, Colcord could have been comfortable with such a double faith. Just a week after the March Revolution, Wilson officially recognized the new Russian government and gave it additional, moral validation in his speech calling for war against Germany on April 2<sup>nd</sup>. The Russian people, he memorably declared, were now "a fit partner for a league of honor" fighting for "the freedom of

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<sup>69</sup> "Authority is natural leadership; men have it by virtue of personality. The problem for democracy is not to limit authority, but to find its natural leaders and give them rein... Free authority is the true servant of the people, whereas circumscribed authority is an insidious autocrat... a vague, indefinite autocracy, that could not be either found or made responsible." Lincoln Colcord, "World Liberalism," *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science* 7, No. 2 (July, 1917), 76-77.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 79

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 73. Also telling was a reference to Catherine "Babushka" Breshkovsky, a prominent pre-Revolution socialist writer. Colcord quoted her as follows; "'The world is not bad, it is only young, and comes from one degree of comprehension to a higher one.'" *Ibid.*, 71.

the world.” President Wilson, writes historian David McFadden, was thus responsible for linking together “democracy, Russia, and world crusade.”<sup>72</sup>

This was precisely the geopolitical sequence that Lincoln Colcord followed for the remainder of the war and into the chaotic postwar era. Full acceptance of the new Russia (and soon, of another, more radical Russian government), combined with his original insistence on a liberal peace, were now Colcord’s benchmarks for judging the legitimacy of Wilson’s wartime leadership. Indeed, he meshed the two seamlessly in a June 5<sup>th</sup> editorial reminding the president that “the Russian policy” for war aims was now officially in line with his own promise from April 2<sup>nd</sup> for the United States itself – “no conquest, no indemnity.”<sup>73</sup>

But Colcord would have to wait half-a-year for a formal statement of Wilson’s war aims. In the interim, events at home and abroad would inject dangerous doubts into his faith in the president. In early June, he privately vented his dissatisfaction with two of the Wilson’s recent policies: the dispatch of a mission to Russia under the notoriously imperialist ex-Senator Elihu Root, and the denial of passports for Americans to attend an international peace conference in Stockholm, Sweden meant to bring together leftist and socialist leaders from countries on both sides of the war. Colcord’s sympathies were already beginning to turn, and as his faith in Wilson waned, his faith in House and the forces of the European left rose to compensate.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> McFadden, *Alternative Paths*, 52.

<sup>73</sup> ““No Conquest, No Indemnity,”” *PPL* (June 5, 1917). Again, this unsigned editorial can be found in Colcord’s personally compiled collection of his articles among his archival papers. CFA Box 19 Folder 503.

<sup>74</sup> ““The point is that the Russians and the Socialists have got hold of the truth this time – the truth that must set us free. But it can’t be accepted by the [Allied] Governments because of a capitalistic tradition. You are the one man in the world that I know of who stands in an irreproachable position with all the Governments, and who at the same time faces and believes in the truth that they are talking in Stockholm and Petrograd. You could bridge the chasm. I doubt if anyone else could.”” LC to Edward House, June 4, 1917, quoted in Reinertson, “Colonel House, Woodrow Wilson and European Socialism 1917-1919,” 249.

It was the peace and the president's ability to make it which troubled Colcord most that fall. "The war cannot be won in the spirit manifested by the President to-day," he wrote to House in early October, referring to Wilson's recent rejection of a call for peace from the Pope. Wilson "unquestionably is thinking very muddled liberalism." The "true liberal, the true man of peace, is the best warrior... while in a flame of energy and passion he makes ready to fight, the true liberal with a flame of love in his heart at the same time makes ready to forgive. The President is rapidly placing America in a position where she can do neither." To his mentor, the man who he now held personally responsible for "the best of his [Wilson's] liberalism," he wondered aloud, "Is the President, like all the heads of governments abroad, allowing himself to become more afraid of peace than of war?"<sup>75</sup>

Colcord was entirely right to be so suspicious. The gulf between the president's liberal words and his illiberal actions was real, and ultimately, a fatal weakness to his entire project of creating a new and better international system with the United States at its head. Historian Ross Kennedy has described this as the "fundamental paradox of Wilson's national security strategy." Reforming international relations to create a permanent world peace was, indeed, Wilson's highest ideal before, during, and after American intervention in the war. But the means he used to achieve it – refusing to make peace with Germany during the war and allowing the Allies to press it too hard at the peace – were precisely the opposite of that ideal. By "practicing power politics to end power politics," not only did Wilson compromise his own reputation, he ensured that there would be no real "end" to the old international system at all.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> LC to Edward House, October 4, 1917, unsent, quoted in *Ibid.*, 287-88.

<sup>76</sup> Kennedy, *The Will to Believe*, 102-03.

In November, the time for testing Colcord's question of Wilson's sincerity finally came. His interest in Russia following the March Revolution was significant, but not predominating. After the Bolshevik Revolution on November 7<sup>th</sup>, his imagination was captured completely. In a series of bold strokes, the new Russian government released the contents of secret treaties signed by the Allied nations promising each other massive imperial spoils after the war's conclusion, and then issued a flat proposal for a general armistice. Following conversations with the old Provisional Government's Ambassador, Boris Bakhmeteff, on November 14<sup>th</sup>, Colcord was immediately convinced that the Bolsheviks' true goal was to "reaffirm the original intent of the [March] Russian revolution... to push home the original demand for a revision of the war aims of the Allies... [for] upon the issue hangs the fate of the war."<sup>77</sup> He made this imperative public in an article later in the month, but that alone was not enough to put his fears to rest.<sup>78</sup>

On December 3, 1917, Colcord wrote Wilson directly to offer his perspective on Russia and its future. His letter was long, but had three key elements, all grounded with a tactful pledge, "I am not a socialist." The first was to assure the president that "the Bolsheviks were not so black as they have been painted," and they had brought "order, not chaos, to Russia." The second was to defend their release of the secret treaties as a brave attempt to hold the Allies to task. And the third was to call on Wilson to send a new, more "sympathetic" mission to Russia and to recognize its Bolshevik-controlled government. "Unless it is recognized," he warned, "America and the Allies must thereafter stand frankly on a basis of imperialistic war aims."<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> LC to Edward House, November 20, 1917, quoted in *Ibid.*, 319.

<sup>78</sup> Lincoln Colcord, "President Gets Bolsheviks Plea For Armistice," *PPL* (November 27, 1917).

<sup>79</sup> LC to Woodrow Wilson, December 3, 1917, in *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson* Volume 45 *November 11, 1917-January 15, 1918*, Arthur S. Link, ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 191-93.

The letter was expertly timed. The very next day, Wilson used his State of the Union Address to give his sympathy to the Russian people (but not their government). Although not what he had pled for, Colcord still lavishly praised the speech in one of his usual articles, calling it a clear reaffirmation of the January 22<sup>nd</sup> “Peace Without Victory” address despite its completely avoiding the issue of the secret treaties.<sup>80</sup> He found some additional comfort in a brief letter from Wilson himself thanking the journalist for his “generous and comprehending” article, but also courteously declining to send a new mission to Russia.<sup>81</sup>

Undeterred by this polite rejection of an issue so important to him, Colcord promptly replied to the president. Again he praised the recent speech but also reiterated his confidence in the Bolshevik government; “Lenine and Trotsky, under the pressure of responsibility, will suffer a change of heart” and “modify” their program “to force social revolution upon nations which are not prepared for it.” More than this, though, Colcord threw back the curtain on the faith that went deeper into his soul than his faith in Wilson alone. A new world was the amorphous dream both men shared, but Colcord put no limits on how far he would go to see it made real:

Not being a socialist myself, I cannot contemplate with equanimity the frightful measures which are surely imminent in the world to-day... Ultimately, of course, there can be no disaster in revolution. But I believe with all my heart that there could always have been an orderly way to accomplish what revolutions have accomplished... *The new world which is plain before us, which is inevitable*, cannot and must not come through anarchy. Yet that, too, is plain before us as the next step, if wise and brave things are not done... But the difference [between compromise and conviction], slight in definition, is vast in results. If there is no other way, and if the time has come, then I am for revolution.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Lincoln Colcord, “Message May Swing Russians Into Line,” *PPL* (December 5, 1917). Clearly speaking for himself, Colcord wrote that the President’s “magnificent liberalism” had “once more justified the faith which world liberalism has unfailingly reposed in him, and has disclosed again that measure of statesmanlike vision which seems to be his unique prerogative and which alone can win the war for democracy.”

<sup>81</sup> Woodrow Wilson to LC, December 6, 1917, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson* Volume 45, 222-23.

<sup>82</sup> LC to Woodrow Wilson, December 8, 1917, in *ibid.*, 251-53. Emphasis added.

Wilson did not reply to this letter, but remarkably, it did not close the door of the White House to the journalist the following month.<sup>83</sup> Nor, for that matter, did Colcord's bombshell editorial of New Year's Day, 1918 – an open declaration of his sympathy with Russia's Bolshevik government, a condemnation of the "western imperialistic democracies" and their secret treaties, and a call for the president to reply to both forces with "a great message of Liberalism that will be will be translated now into great Liberal acts."<sup>84</sup> A flurry of letters to the *Public Ledger* ensued, some praising the piece and others denouncing it along with the paper's editorial line more generally.<sup>85</sup> The critics were not without due cause. H.B. Brougham was in lock-step with Colcord in his distaste for Allied imperialism and in seeing the necessity of Russia's cooperation with the United States to forging a liberal peace.<sup>86</sup> By mid-March, Colcord's articles and editorials on Russia created such a stir in Philadelphia that the paper was forced to respond to accusations of white-washing the Bolsheviks' revolutionary ideology.<sup>87</sup> The *Public Ledger's* official statement did not rebuke its reporter, but took an open-ended stance on

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<sup>83</sup> Colcord and his editor at the *Public Ledger*, H.B. Brougham, were cordially received by the president in mid-January to advocate a proposal by Bernard Baruch – an industrialist, banker, and head of the War Industries Board – to purchase the *New York Tribune* and convert it into another reliably pro-administration media outlet. Woodrow Wilson to Bernard Baruch, January 19, 1918, in *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson* Volume 46 *January 16-March 12, 1918*, Arthur S. Link, ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 36. Several months later, as the *Ledger* began taking heavy criticism for its pro-Bolshevik editorial line, Wilson declined a request from its other editor, J.P. Spurgeon, to give the paper an official statement of confidence (he delegated that task to his private secretary, Joseph Patrick Tumulty), but remarked that its two leading figures, "Brougham and Colcord," were "two very progressive fellows." Woodrow Wilson to Joseph Patrick Tumulty, April 9, 1918, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson* Volume 47 *March 13-May 12, 1918*, Arthur S. Link, ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 279n1.

<sup>84</sup> Lincoln Colcord, "Terms Of A World Peace," *PPL* (January 1, 1918). This editorial was significant enough that a truncated version was reprinted in the prominent liberal magazine, *Issues and Events*. Lincoln Colcord, "Russia Deserted and Desperate," *Issues and Events* 8, No. 1 (January 5, 1918), 45.

<sup>85</sup> "'Terms Of A World Peace' Is Discussed By Many Critics," *PPL* (January 3, 1918).

<sup>86</sup> H.B. Brougham to LC, March 6, 1918, CFA Box 23 Folder 526a. This letter came with an enclosure for a provocative editorial ridiculing Americans who were so single-mindedly anti-Bolshevik that they were effectively pro-German. Colcord had already published an article with a similar thesis. "Those who turn against Russia in her hour of greatest need will come back some day ashamed to partake of the blessing of deliverance from autocracy." Lincoln Colcord, "Censorship Blamed For Russia's Plight," *PPL* (February 25, 1918).

<sup>87</sup> The most potent accusations came from a rival Philadelphia newspaper, the *North American*, which publicly connected Colcord and Edward House to insinuate that in willingly "spreading his Bolshevik propaganda it [the *Ledger*] had the highest possible sanction." "What Bolshevism Is," *Philadelphia North American* (March 20, 1918).

the Bolsheviks themselves; “the question is not one of detail, but of principle. We are for whatever party represents the cause of liberty in any country.”<sup>88</sup>

Colcord found much needed relief in Wilson’s course through the early months of 1918. On January 8<sup>th</sup>, the president finally announced the war aims that Colcord had so long waited for, his Fourteen Points – a joint production between Wilson and Edward House. In his article editorializing the speech, Colcord conceded that Wilson’s terms for the peace were not perfect, and on territorial issues like Alsace-Lorraine and a Polish state it was downright “vague.” But it did take two vital steps in the right direction: Wilson “implicitly recognized the government of the Soviet” through his sympathetic message to “the Russian people,” and gave a positive reference to an anti-war declaration by German Socialists in the Reichstag from the previous summer as a means of stimulating “German Liberalism” to push for the reins of government. Wilson’s speech, Colcord wrote, “his message to the new world,” was the “outright stroke of liberal and farseeing statesmanship” that world had been waiting for. It would “accomplish more than many armies could do toward a true solution” to the war.<sup>89</sup>

These were, indeed, two of the effects Wilson and House intended to achieve with their document. But as shown in Colcord’s individual case, it also achieved their desired domestic effect as well, rallying American liberal opinion behind the president after months of anxious waiting for a real move towards peace and a postwar new order.<sup>90</sup> In February, Wilson gave Colcord more rhetorical fodder for his hopes. Replying to recent statements by German and Austro-Hungarian diplomats, the president struck a conciliatory tone toward Austria but kept up his hard line against Germany in a move to create a split between the Central Powers and

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<sup>88</sup> “The Public Ledger and the Bolsheviks,” *PPL* (March 15, 1918).

<sup>89</sup> Lincoln Colcord, “Speech Deals A Telling Blow For Liberalism,” *PPL* (January 9, 1918).

<sup>90</sup> Neu, *Colonel House: A Biography*, 332-33.



encourage change of government in Germany. In addition, he reiterated his ultimate goal for the war, ““a new international order based upon broad and universal principles of right and justice.”” Just as in 1917, Colcord continued to read into such vague lines absolutely everything he desired of the president. “What does all this mean,” he asked his readers, “if it does not mean a complete avowal of all that the Russian revolution asks for, all that the new world requires?””<sup>91</sup>

But this was a tenuous fantasy, and a new issue – Allied military intervention in Russia’s ongoing civil war – brought the reality home. In early March, news began to circulate that Japan, with the encouragement of Britain and France, was planning an invasion of far eastern Russia on the pretense of preserving the territory from the civil war in the west. Colcord saw in this nothing more than rank imperialism and warned the president against joining the venture. “Liberal critics here assert that in so doing America would destroy the foundations of her moral position in the war, legitimize the distrust which the people of Russia have for American democracy, and make it impossible for her to enunciate a clear message of liberalism to the world.””<sup>92</sup>

This was a prophecy painfully close to the future, but Colcord used his voice in the press to push hard against intervention through the month, a strategy mirrored by Colonel House working with the president directly.<sup>93</sup> Colcord’s initial articles on the subject almost quake with rage at the prospect of American military intervention in Russia’s internal affairs, an attack not just on a wartime ally (at least until the Bolsheviks made peace with Germany on March 3<sup>rd</sup>), but also on a living symbol of Wilson’s own dream of a new international order coming to fruition. “Such a compromise,” Colcord wrote of U.S. intervention, “would too clearly land America in a

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<sup>91</sup> Lincoln Colcord, “Wilson Seeks A New Order, Just To The Whole World,” *PPL* (February 12, 1918).

<sup>92</sup> Lincoln Colcord, Liberals Are Opposing Plan Of Japanese,” *PPL* (March 2, 1918).

<sup>93</sup> McFadden, *Alternative Paths*, 43.

moral position in which it would be impossible for her to maintain with sincerity those principles of international idealism which President Wilson had laid down.”<sup>94</sup>

Colcord was fortunate that in mid-March, the president expressed what he saw as a veiled opposition to intervention through yet another ambiguous message of “sympathy” with “the Russian people.”<sup>95</sup> But neither this transitory policy nor Colcord’s faith in Wilson was to last. Geoffrey Hodgson sums up Woodrow Wilson’s shifting responses to revolutionary Russia as “a special case of his general tragedy.” His initial idealism was never resolute, and it eroded steadily in the face of real Allied demands for support in their campaign of intervention. “As in Mexico,” writes Hodgson, Wilson “began by professing his sympathy for a people and his contempt for their rulers, and he ended by making war on both government and people.”<sup>96</sup>

Signs of Colcord’s looming break with the administration were showing across his public life. At the annual meeting of the Academy of Political Science in late April, Colcord instigated what was reported as “an almost belligerent debate” with George Creel – head of the Committee on Public Information and another member of Edward House’s circle – over the issue of wartime censorship. Without mentioning his own position from April 1917, Colcord charged that “the censorship, as it has been used almost from the beginning of the war, is in effect a denial of almost all that we mean by democracy and of all that we aim to be fighting for... The press of the country is pitiful in its dearth of intelligent comment on the good issues of the war; a blight

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<sup>94</sup> Lincoln Colcord, “Japan ‘Determined To Have Way In East,’” *PPL* (March 3, 1918).

<sup>95</sup> Lincoln Colcord, “American Diplomacy Again Blazes Trail In Far East,” *PPL* (March 13, 1918). After the fact, Colcord also claimed that Colonel House showed him a copy of a private diplomatic note sent by Wilson to Japan in February stating “beyond denial or equivocation, that America was absolutely opposed to Japanese intervention in Siberia.” Colcord credited the note with being singularly responsible for delaying intervention in Russia until the summer, but also criticized the president for not making it public, an act which “would have stopped intervention for all time.” Lincoln Colcord, “Japan and Siberia,” *Nation* 110, No. 2845 (January 10, 1920), 36.

<sup>96</sup> Hodgson, *Woodrow Wilson’s Silent Partner*, 170-71.

seems to have fallen on independent thought and candid understanding.”<sup>97</sup> He was speaking from personal experience. After the letters of protest in March from its largely conservative readership about the leftward drift of the paper, the *Public Ledger* slowly returned to a more conservative (but still pro-Wilson) line. As a consequence, Colcord’s articles and editorials became less frequent after the spring, and in August, he was dismissed from the paper outright.<sup>98</sup>

By July, “the inconsistencies and contradictions in American and Allied policy” had become so acute that he was privately moving to organize his own circle of liberal journalists to use their influence to alter the course of the war.<sup>99</sup> But before his confidence in Wilson evaporated, Colcord made one more direct appeal to the president to stay out of the Allied intervention in Russia. On July 7<sup>th</sup>, he gave his last avowal of faith, his last promise of righteous glory for standing firm on liberal principles, and his last warning on the danger of failure.

You only possess the true facts, and see clearly; I would not be writing if I lacked the conviction that you are preparing to do an extraordinary thing. The task before you is hard and thankless, but the future will repay you with the honor reserved only for those who dare to stand alone. I believe that America’s heroic opportunity has come. For there can be no compromise on this issue without ultimate defeat. I believe sincerely that anything short of full and outright action in co-operation with the Soviets will drench Russia in blood from end to end, and throw her body and soul into the arms of Germany... The tragic fact which, from a future social plane, history will record if this summer goes wrong, is that Russia all the while in her present phase has actually been struggling towards the same new world for which the people everywhere are fighting.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> “Editorial Incidence and Reflection,” *Commerce and Finance* 7, No. 18 (May 1, 1918), 461. “Plans for Winning the War Discussed,” *The Survey* 40, No. 6 (May 11, 1918), 163.

<sup>98</sup> Reinertson, “Colonel House, Woodrow Wilson and European Socialism 1917-1919,” 614n1.

<sup>99</sup> “Memorandum – Subject: American Propaganda in Enemy Countries,” July 5, 1918, CFA Box 23 Folder 584. It is unclear whether Colcord actually circulated his plan to “influence the course of our primary propaganda” in the direction of “full co-operation with Government of the Soviets,” “an outright revision of the imperialistic Allied war aims,” and “a frank support by America of the liberal opposition groups in England and France.” He did include on his list of “suggestions” for personnel a mixture of journalists, professional men, and government officials, all evaluated by their standing as “liberals” of prominence or good promise. Also on the list were two outright socialists, Paul Hanna of the *New York Call*, and the novelist Ernest Poole.

<sup>100</sup> LC to Woodrow Wilson, July 7, 1918, in *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson* Volume 48 *May 13-June 17, 1918*, Arthur S. Link, ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 547.

Colcord did not realize it at the time, but no matter how he pled his case for non-intervention, whether with a stronger emphasis on military expedience or more chiding the president about his liberal promises, the real tragedy is that it was already too late. On July 6<sup>th</sup>, Wilson made his decision; the United States would join the Allied invasions of Russia's far east and far north for the ostensible reason of deterring German advances on Russia's resources. Later in the month he announced his decision to the Allies in a private note, and by August, American ships, guns, and soldiers were on their way to Siberia and the Arctic Circle.<sup>101</sup>

Even in the face of this disaster, Colcord's idealism did not evaporate overnight. He joined the League of Free Nations Association in late autumn to serve as its publicity director, no doubt hoping to still play a public role in advocating for a moderate peace as the end of the war drew near.<sup>102</sup> But that hope, too, would collapse completely as the terms of the real peace became apparent at the start of the following year. Ironically, though he twice pledged to Wilson that he was not a socialist – a sincere avowal both in name and substance<sup>103</sup> – Colcord's position on Wilson's foreign policy had been drifting in the socialist direction since mid-1917. Elizabeth McKillen notes that socialists were as unconvinced by Wilson's internationalist rhetoric during the war as they were before American entry. The war in their eyes had always been a defense of capitalism and imperialism, and by relentlessly criticizing the president on those grounds (even

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<sup>101</sup> Georg Schild, *Between Ideology and Realpolitik: Woodrow Wilson and the Russian Revolution, 1917-1921* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1995), 82-83.

<sup>102</sup> "The New League of Free Nations Association," *The Survey* 41, No. 9 (November 30, 1918), 250. *Selected Articles on the League of Nations*, compiled by Edith M. Phelps (New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1919), xxxviii.

<sup>103</sup> In July 1918, Colcord used an article applauding the co-operative movement to illustrate the difference between his position and what he understood to be socialism. He accepted capitalism as "basic human nature" and saw it as in need of only spiritual reform, whereas socialism "says the whole capitalistic system is basically wrong" and "makes war against all capital as such." "The First National Co-Operative Convention in America," MS, CFA Box 21 Folder 546. Colcord had a very similar critique of socialist internationalism, which he saw as "simply unnationalism." The "true internationalism," he felt, could only be "an equitable agreement between nationalisms." Lincoln Colcord, "Danger of Junkerism Drawing U.S. Into War," *PPL* (February 10, 1917).

in face of legal repression), they played a key role in “shift[ing] the debate over foreign policy to the left” as the conflict dragged on.<sup>104</sup> Indeed, just as Colcord distinguished himself from the socialists, so too did socialists distinguish themselves from him. “The League we shall not get,” said Evans Clark, a New York City Socialist Party member, “is the League of the well-meaning liberal professional folk: the League of H.G. Wells and H.L. Brailsford, the League of Herbert Coly and Lincoln Colcord... The League we shall get... [is] a League of Businessman’s Republics. We know who will control it and in whose interests it will be directed.”<sup>105</sup>

Clark was not wrong, and Colcord continued to drift into that more radical camp as the reality slowly took form. The end of the war thus brought him no solace. Russia was still a pariah state, and the United States was still contributing to the “demolition” its unprecedented social experiment, “the next step forward in the machinery of democratic government... To break the new Russian democracy means, in no uncertain terms, to lose the fight for the new world.”<sup>106</sup> This was always the hardest test of Wilson’s commitment to his principles, and it was this test which the president decisively failed. In Lincoln Colcord’s final judgement, the war for the new world would forever be the war that Woodrow Wilson lost.

### **The Reversing Current, 1919-1924**

The years which followed his expulsion from the Philadelphia *Public Ledger*, American intervention in the Russian Civil War, and the November armistice ending the First World War, were a period of extraordinary activity for Lincoln Colcord. Beginning all at once at the start of 1919, he let loose a veritable flood of writing on national and international dilemmas, joined a

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<sup>104</sup> Elizabeth McKillen, *Making the World Safe for Workers: Labor, the Left, and Wilsonian Internationalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 9.

<sup>105</sup> “Notes on the Tenth Annual Convention, I.S.S.” *The Intercollegiate Socialist* 7, No. 1 (Oct.-Nov. 1918), 26.

<sup>106</sup> Lincoln Colcord, “Soviet Russia and the American Revolution,” *The Dial* 65, No. 7 (December 28, 1918), 595.

dizzying array of political organizations, and became a professional advocate for left-liberal causes stretching from industrial reorganization to civil liberties.<sup>107</sup> But Colcord was just one of a legion of liberals and leftists who defected from the Wilson camp in the World War's immediate wake. Long before the struggle in Paris and Washington over the peace, writes Thomas Knock, Wilson had made "crucial mistakes" that cost him the needed support for his final victory – first his acquiescence to the wave of wartime repression that Colcord himself spoke out against in April 1918, and then to the demands of the Allies for a harsh peace at Versailles. As truly as Wilson believed in his own "progressive internationalism," responsibility for the erosion of his once broad base of domestic support in 1919 ultimately lies in his failure to live up to his own idealism at home and abroad.<sup>108</sup>

Colcord was well-positioned to make known his political shift. In the spring of that year he was hired as an associate editor and Washington correspondent by one of the premier left-liberal magazines in the country – *The Nation* – owned and edited by the hardline pacifist Oswald Garrison Villard whose other vehicle, the New York *Evening Post*, had been the only American newspaper to publish the full texts of the Allies' secret treaties during the war.<sup>109</sup> Remaining on the staff into the following year, this gave him a high journalistic perch for

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<sup>107</sup> Among Colcord's credits from this period were serving on the press staff of the Plumb Plan League – a pressure group advocating for the nationalization the American railroad system; on the executive committee of The New Machine – scientific management-pioneer Henry L. Gantt's group for promoting the reorganization of American industry along technocratic lines; on the national executive committee of the Committee of the 48 – a laborite liberal third-party movement which operated in the year preceding the 1920 Presidential Election; on the first national committee of the American Civil Liberties Union; as an editor of the Washington, D.C. political magazine *The Searchlight*; and, for the single month of February in 1919, as director of a group of his own construction – "The Truth About Russia Committee" – which submitted a brief to the Overman Committee that month requesting it accept testimony from certain "non-socialist and non-sympathizer" Americans whose on-the-ground experience in pre- and post-October Revolution Russia could clear up the dangerous "misconception of the Russian revolutionary situation which the American public now holds." "The Truth About Russia Committee," CFA Box 21 Folder 556.

<sup>108</sup> Knock, *To End All Wars*, 267-68.

<sup>109</sup> Ronald Steel, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980), 132. Colcord's own copy of the treaties was a 1918-dated reprint from Villard's *Evening Post*. CFA Box 19 Folder 518.

reigning down brutal criticism against the president and his administration. During the immediate postwar years, beliefs that had gradually developed during the war calcified into a set of absolute convictions about Wilson and his foreign policy failures. These were the grim memories that Colcord carried intact into the decades to come. He had warned the president about the judgement of history; now, he passed a merciless judgement of his own.

“We went into the war, on the argument of the President, to fight for ideals and for a democratic peace,” wrote Colcord in his first article for *The Nation*. “Neither ideals nor a democratic peace have been the resultant... secret treaties are what we have won.” There was no hint of this future in the public mind in 1917 or 1918. “Perhaps we were determined to idealize the war,” he wondered, speaking for both his nation and himself. After all, “[t]he cue for idealism had been given from Washington.” But the “net result our mal-education” was “the creation of an ignorance so vast and an emotionalism so overwhelming as well-nigh to defeat the original purpose and integrity of the enterprise.”<sup>110</sup>

No one bore more responsibility for the disaster than President Wilson. Although the title of Colcord’s piece read that Wilson was “Defeated at Paris,” in fact, Wilson was defeated “at the beginning of our participation in the war,” when the time was most ripe to “kick over the traces and demand a revision of the Allied imperialistic war aims.” But this he did not do. With the public in his pocket, he was free to “evade” the inconsistencies between his words and his policies. As a terrible consequence, “America was committed to support of, and actually was fighting for, the imperialistic aims.” That Wilson knew of the secret treaties even before they were publicly released – a fact which Colcord claimed to have learned in September 1917 “from

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<sup>110</sup> Lincoln Colcord, “Why Wilson was Defeated at Paris,” *The Nation* 108, No. 2811 (May 17, 1919), 782-83.

*Colonel House himself*” – was the ultimate betrayal. By a combination of irresolution and conciliation of the Allies, Wilson allowed his own ideals to be “perverted to ignoble and disastrous ends... and since men have died and empires have been lost and infinite wrong has been done in pursuit of the illusion, it is difficult to forgive him his rather peculiar and deliberate sin.”<sup>111</sup>

Colcord did not forgive him. Later in the year, after the signing by the European powers of the Treaty of Versailles, his already overwhelming sense of righteous indignation reached a high from which it never came down. The treaty was an act of “moral depravity,” an “evil pact” which would “consign the Europe of the future, as well as the America of the future, to oceans of blood and wars innumerable.” Colcord threw his support behind the leading members of the Republican opposition to Treaty and to American participation in the League of Nations – the “Irreconcilables” – as the only hope for staving off that terrible future. He praised Senators Hiram Johnson of California and William Borah of Idaho specifically as men whose “sincerity,” “honor,” and “patriotism,” as opposed to mere partisan interests, were beyond reproach.<sup>112</sup>

Wilson, by contrast, dishonored himself and his country by promoting a corrupt peace. Colcord spared nothing in demonizing the president in the months before the Congressional vote to ratify the Treaty of Versailles. Writing once more in *The Nation*, he also gave his first real *mea culpa* for his own wartime role in “help[ing] shore up the President’s power.” It was only too late that he and his cohort in Colonel House’s “journalistic group” finally “began to lose

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 783. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>112</sup> Lincoln Colcord, “The Results of the White House Conference,” *The Nation* 109, No. 2826 (August 30, 1919), 282-83. In 1919, Colcord initiated a significant chain of correspondence with Johnson on their mutually opposition to the Treaty of Versailles, to the League of Nations, and to American intervention in Soviet Russia. He revived this connection in the mid-1930s when, as before, they were unified by another spirit of opposition to the foreign policy of Franklin Roosevelt. For the 1919 letters, see CFA Box 11 Folder 246.



faith. We were young and ardent men, but we were not fools.” Now the truth was clear.

“America went into the war under the leadership of Woodrow Wilson for aims precisely the opposite of those incorporated in this settlement... She did not go to Europe to fight for the secret treaties, for any pact which sustains them, or for any League which guarantees such a pact.” Wilson, “through his bureaucratic engines of censorship and suppression... has prostituted the soul of a nation – the most sacred charge that can rest in the hands of a leader of men. It will take America years, and maybe generations to recover from the blight of his hypocrisy.”<sup>113</sup>

For his part, Lincoln Colcord never recovered from that betrayal. He was vindicated in his hostility to the Versailles Treaty and the League when they were narrowly defeated in the Senate in November 1919. The unresolved crisis in Russia, on the other hand, nagged him into 1920. American and Allied intervention in the Russian civil war stoked Colcord’s sympathy with the Soviet government to a white heat that lingered even after the withdrawal of the last American troops from Siberia in April 1920. Massive American support to the newly created Polish state in its ongoing war with Russia threw more fuel on the fire. In an argument strikingly similar to the one he would make against Lend-Lease twenty years later, Colcord alleged that the American government sold tens of millions of dollars in surplus war materiel to the Poles with “no restriction” upon its use, and issued tens of millions more in credit, as a means of attacking Russia through a proxy. These exchanges were effectively an “American policy towards Russia,” one which constituted “an act of war against the Soviet government.”<sup>114</sup>

As before, “responsibility” for this and every other misstep to date laid with Wilson. From 1918 on, his vain attempts at suppressing the Bolsheviks while preaching “democratic

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<sup>113</sup> Lincoln Colcord, “Black is White,” *The Nation* 109, No. 2828 (September 13, 1919), 364.

<sup>114</sup> Lincoln Colcord, “America Aids the Polish Drive,” *The New Republic* 23, No. 290 (June 23, 1920), 117-18.

crusade” revealed “the grievous faults in [his] character.” Wilson constructed his own “hero-myth,” and his assault on Russia was nothing more than an expression of his all-consuming vanity. He had pre-written the “scroll” of history, “visualized himself as the savior of civilization, as the great liberal leader of the world.” This, Colcord wrote, was “the Wilson illusion,” and it was only now, after the tragedy had run its course, that he could be understood for what he was; “not a demigod, but an extremely fallible human being.” Wilson had demanded “perfect faith,” but in the end, he gave the faithful nothing for their devotion.<sup>115</sup>

Lincoln Colcord’s grand faith in Wilson, and his faith in the new world which Wilson promised, were now interred in the deepest recesses of his mind. In their wake went his once promising career in professional journalism. He resigned from *The Nation* abruptly in late 1920 and returned to Searsport, Maine. The reasons were not political, but personal. Colcord hoped to resume his fiction writing after a long hiatus, producing a new book of short stories in 1922.<sup>116</sup> His wife Blanche, however, was also seriously ill with cancer, and the move was primarily to preserve her health. Her death in 1924 was a blow so crushing it compelled him to leave Maine entirely for the rest of the decade. Yet it was a fitting conclusion to an already dismal period of his life. One more tragedy piled on top of the rest, one more loss, one more reason to look in new directions for a new purpose. But with him always was the memory these years and these events. In the next decade, they would return to the forefront of his thought, a poisoned strand of history woven into new events and new crises that once more demanded his response.

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<sup>115</sup> Lincoln Colcord, “The Basis of Our Russian Policy,” *The Freeman* 3, No. 53 (March 16, 1921), 8-10.

<sup>116</sup> Lincoln Colcord, *An Instrument of the Gods and Other Stories of the Sea* (New York: Macmillan, 1922).

## CHAPTER TWO

### LINCOLN COLCORD: APOSTACY

#### Forward

Lincoln Colcord never escaped from the legacy of Woodrow Wilson and the First World War. The lessons of the 1917-20 were permanently fixed in his mind as the ultimate standard for measuring national and world events. Surprisingly, the early years of the 1930s found him a public supporter of Franklin Roosevelt. But in short order, he found such serious fault with the new administration's domestic policies that he effectively switched from the Democratic to the Republican Party. Not long after, its foreign policy, too, became anathema to him. Colcord thus took up a new stance as an opponent of FDR on both those fronts, but it was foreign affairs that came to dominate his interests and fears during the later 1930s and into the 1940s. Through those years of crisis he was more deeply concerned than ever with the direction of American public opinion. Initially, he was confident that by their collective good sense they would turn back the dangers he saw drawing the nation into domestic and international disaster. But gradually, and with his vision constantly turning backward to the Wilson era, doubts seeped in as Roosevelt's power and popularity became undeniable. "Why is it that people persist in thinking that we have a different world," a bewildered Colcord asked in early 1937. "Haven't they read history? Or don't they believe that things which have happened once cannot happen again?"<sup>1</sup>

Preventing recent history from being repeated was the basis of Lincoln Colcord's isolationism. It also drove him completely away from the idealism that defined his early career in

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<sup>1</sup> LC to John Bassett Moore, February 28, 1937, CFA Box 12 Folder 299. He only speaking half rhetorically. "The fallacy of the last twenty years, springing directly from Wilson's intellectual dishonesty, has been the notion that only bad men fight, that good men hold what they have by divine reason, and that the status quo can maintain itself through its intrinsic virtue... Well, we had a good time fighting the 'war to end war,' and we'll have an even better time fighting the 'war for legal neutrality [meaning, the "unneutral" Neutrality Act].'"

Washington and towards a realism so hard-boiled it was almost Darwinian. Yet he continued to call himself a liberal, and even within his adamantly anti-interventionist foreign policy he was not totally inflexible. Historian Christopher Nichols has written that out of the anti-war and anti-Versailles movements of the Wilson-era came a “new isolationism” for the 1920s and 30s – a fusion of “fairly strict isolation in diplomacy” with “largely open and private engagement in commerce and cultural arenas,” coupled with a Western Hemisphere focus and a desire to “minimize war” where it was fought.<sup>2</sup> This basic model fits Colcord’s case well. His isolationism did not entail absolute detachment from the rest of the world. On the score of economics, it was just the opposite. His position on neutrality was the United States had an obligation to open itself to trade without discrimination between belligerents in a given conflict or between nations at war and nations at peace. Such a policy, he argued, was both the only legitimate course of true neutrality and the only sure way keep the massive economic advantages that the United States possessed out of the hands of one side alone. But after this “free trade” position, Colcord drew the firmest of lines on the fundamental issue of U.S. non-involvement in foreign wars: Manchuria, Ethiopia, Spain, and finally, the Second World War.

Yet step by step and war by war, America inched closer to just those faraway conflicts under the leadership of FDR and the lingering “curse” of Woodrow Wilson’s internationalist idealism.<sup>3</sup> In a pessimistic peacetime mood, Colcord brooded that “you can’t expect intelligence from a country whose mind had been demoralized by twenty years of dishonest intellectual

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<sup>2</sup> Christopher McKnight Nichols, *Promise and Peril: America at the Dawn of a Global Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 329-31. Emily Rosenberg, by contrast, argues that the practice of limited diplomatic engagement with intense promotion of private enterprise abroad was not an expression of “isolationism,” but rather, a tool of “liberal expansionism.” It was only in the context of the Great Depression and the rise of the Axis states that the practice was gradually abandoned for another strategy to extend American power around the world, “the international regulatory state.” Emily Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 114-15, 169.

<sup>3</sup> LC to Edwin Borchard, April 8, 1936, CFA Box 7 Folder 96.

leadership, and who now has in the saddle a demagogue who could steal Wilson's shirt any day in a poker game of intellectual dishonesty... Roosevelt is repeating the same shocking intellectual dishonesty as Wilson's. It keeps on raining – the deluge is yet to come.”<sup>4</sup>

The tide of war surged closer to American shores from 1939 to 1941. But up to and beyond the bitter end at Pearl Harbor – the day that one erstwhile isolationist remarked “ended isolationism for any realist”<sup>5</sup> – Colcord held fast to his conviction that the United States could and should remain uninvolved in Europe's and Asia's quarrels. In spite of a grim but astute understanding that the balance of the intervention debate was turning towards Roosevelt's “aid short of war” policy from the very beginning, he continued to promote neutrality even without hard faith that it would carry the day. Colcord annunciated that final vision and that pessimism most clearly to a fellow isolationist and an old liberal of the Wilson era. “Our duty is to save America. We had nothing to do with the present war. Our policy towards it should have been from the first to watch it with pain and a considerable degree of cynicism, and to be prepared to go on living with the forces that eventually came out on top.”<sup>6</sup> Such was the isolationist ideal, but it was one all too far removed from the real current of American life and politics.

### **Old Ship, New Current, 1930-1934**

The death of his wife in 1924 was the capstone to Lincoln Colcord's sad half-decade following the First World War. But a subsequent move to Minnesota reinvigorated his spirit and professional fortunes. In mid-1927, he returned to the east and settled himself and his daughter Inez in New York City. There he resumed his place in literature by becoming a regular (though

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<sup>4</sup> LC to Archie Binns, April 1, 1937, CFA Box 7 Folder 90.

<sup>5</sup> Arthur Vandenberg, *The Private Papers of Senator Vandenberg*, edited by Arthur H. Vandenberg, Jr. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1952), 1.

<sup>6</sup> LC to Amos Pinchot, September 7, 1940, CFA Box 72 Folder 1222. Emphasis in the original.

free-lance) book reviewer for the *New York Herald-Tribune*, a generally conservative and business-oriented broadsheet.<sup>7</sup> This paper would be his most consistent source of income for the remainder of his life. It was also his most frequent outlet for airing his politics both in his reviews and more sporadic opinion pieces. In 1929 he, Inez, and a new wife, Frances Brooks, returned to Maine and once more made Searsport his permanent home. For many years of the 1930s, however, Colcord also wintered at his mother's home in Mount Vernon, New York. This was partly for the sake of his health, but it also kept him close to the social circle he ran in during the Great War – he counted among his urbanite old friends Edward House, Bernard Baruch, owner and editor of *The Nation* Oswald Garrison Villard, and journalist Isaac Don Levine – and to the press and publishing industries which he still depended on for his livelihood.

Amidst this flurry of activity, Colcord was strikingly quiet on political issues of any kind and remained so even after the beginning of the Great Depression.<sup>8</sup> In particular, a full decade passed between his last exposition on foreign affairs in the early 1920s and his next one in 1932. The impetus for the burst of new commentary was itself significant. In September 1931, Japan invaded the northern Chinese province of Manchuria, a space long within its economic sphere of influence but now coveted as an outright colonial protectorate. In defiance of the League of Nations, the Kellogg-Briand Pact prohibiting non-defensive war, and the American interest in China as well, Japan thus took the first significant step toward breaking the international status

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<sup>7</sup> Graham J. White, *FDR and the Press* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 75, 111-12.

<sup>8</sup> One of the few exceptions to this was a 1928 editorial submitted (unsuccessfully) to the *New York Times* championing Senator Henrik Shipstead – newly reelected despite his risky shift from the Republican Party to the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party – as “a Viking in strength and stature,” “an old-fashioned democrat,” and “perhaps the most constructive Progressive in American public life.” Colcord had befriended Shipstead during his time in Minnesota and kept up the relationship through the 1930s and 1940s on the grounds of that personal history and their mutual opposition to FDR's domestic and foreign policies. LC to Henrik Shipstead, November 13, 1928, with attachment, “Henrik Shipstead: Lone Wolf of Minnesota,” MS, CFA Box 25 Folder 631.

quo that had largely held since the end of the First World War. With the benefit of hindsight, it was also the clear first step on the long road to the Second World War.<sup>9</sup>

The invasion proceeded swiftly, but so did Colcord's reaction. In December 1931, he sent a long article on the war to *Collier's* magazine, but was rejected. He then rewrote the piece and sent it to *Harper's* instead. The editor leapt at the opportunity, pushing Colcord to make final revisions immediately so that he might be credited as "a true prophet" for predicting the war's end as an undisputed Japanese victory.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, the war ended just after his submission deadline in late February. But nevertheless, "The Realism of Japanese Diplomacy" hit newsstands on March 20, 1932 as the lead article in *Harper's* April issue. Despite the Far Eastern setting, this piece was a clear restatement of the positions Colcord had formed before, during, and after the First World War. Now, his initial isolationist impulse from the period prior to American intervention – as well as his instinct to deny moral differences between nations and instead see all countries as driven by self-interest – merged with the bitter historical lessons he absorbed in the Great War's wake. Together, they became a geopolitical ethos whose essence was not idealism, but hard-boiled realism.<sup>11</sup>

From this "realistic view," as he called it, Colcord first and foremost laid the blame for facilitating the invasion on the League of Nations, which offered such untenable promises of collective security that it "undermined any adequate effort to prepare China to protect herself."

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<sup>9</sup> For a sample of historians in agreement with this popular conclusion, consider John Wiltz and Justus Doenecke, *From Isolation to War, 1931-1941* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2003), 19, Niall Ferguson, *The War of the World: Twentieth-Century Conflict and the Descent of the West* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2006), 312, and John Lukacs, *The Legacy of the Second World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 16.

<sup>10</sup> Lee Hartman to LC, January 30, 1932, CFA Box 38 Folder 823.

<sup>11</sup> Hartman also took the liberty of sending the MS of the article to Walter Lippmann – like Colcord, a writer for the *Herald-Tribune* and a former member of the House circle, but now a much more prominent political commentator – for review. Lippmann supported publishing Colcord's piece, calling it "a bit super-hard-boiled, but healthy for that reason." Walter Lippmann to Lee Hartman, January 28, 1932, CFA Box 38 Folder 823.

He also derided the mainstream of American opinion for falling victim to “a sort of propaganda, based on a delusion of international cooperation,” and for placing “its faith in a fallacious and non-existent new world.” The “basic facts and plain realities” were the uniformity of nations in their pursuit of self-interest. The very question of “right or wrong” was a false premise. “No one is actually to blame for the way national forces operate, and no one actually wants to do wrong.” While acknowledging that such a view might be unpopular, he thought Japan had “done the world a distinct service in stripping post-war thought of its unhealthy illusions.” Alluding to American history, he credited Japan with reminding Western observers just how “a nation acts in pursuit of its manifest destiny... the way all nations in the ascendancy have acted in history.”<sup>12</sup>

The article revealed much of Colcord’s complicated conception of nationalism. While the League’s feeble attempts to intimidate Japan with sanctions were simply “empty threats,” the invasion’s underlying cause could only be defined in nationalist terms. “So long as the spirit of nationalism persists,” he wrote, “nations will strive against one another for advantage.” But the impossible prerequisite for collective security to function, “the price of world peace through the League... comes down to the renunciation of the principle of nationalism,” an inexpugnable element of human nature. Thus, in spite of the League, nation states alone still held the power to determine the fate of the world, as they always had. Colcord predicted that Japan would probably conquer China as part of its bigger scheme for “assuming hegemony in the Orient,” but also that it would “die of the victory.” Showing lingering traces of his youthful infatuation with China, Colcord was confident that its national “stability and permanence” gave it an immortal strength which the Japanese could never defeat. But in any event, the Manchurian affair was “already

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 516, 520-21.



settled,” and the onus of resolving the conflict permanently could only lie with China and Japan, “where it belongs in ultimate terms.”<sup>13</sup>

Colcord’s article was recognized immediately. The Canadian journal *Pacific Affairs*, a leader in that field of study, called it “extremely significant and provocative” in a long and generally positive review.<sup>14</sup> The article also made its way to the scene of its own action. The student newspaper of Beijing’s Yenching University quoted Colcord at length in an editorial seconding his analysis.<sup>15</sup> More importantly, “The Realism of Japanese Diplomacy,” was cited by one of the most prominent commentators of the interwar era, Lothrop Stoddard, a fellow geopolitical realist with a similar concern about the misdirection of American public opinion away from “the world as it is” and towards “a phantom world-we-would-like-to-see.”<sup>16</sup>

A recent historian has described Colcord’s article as a rare example of an American observer whose sympathies leaned towards the Japanese during the Manchurian Crisis.<sup>17</sup> This, however, is not an accurate assessment of Colcord’s mindset, and a distinction ought to be made between sympathy and pragmatic understanding. Granted, he did pay Japan a conspicuously high compliment by calling their diplomacy “stark and unblushing, but practical and realistic.” And likewise, his snide comparison of Japan’s imperialism with American “manifest destiny” was later part of the argument the Japanese themselves made in response to the Hoover administration’s indignant reaction to the invasion.<sup>18</sup> But in essence, Colcord was no more sympathetic to Japanese imperialism in 1932 than he had been in 1915 in *Vision of War*, or, for

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 514-15, 518, 523.

<sup>14</sup> “In the Periodicals,” *Pacific Affairs* 5, No. 6 (June 1932), 571-72.

<sup>15</sup> “Chinese Editor Lauds Mr. Colcord,” *Bangor Daily News* (July 20, 1932).

<sup>16</sup> Lothrop Stoddard, *Lonely America* (New York: Country Life Press, 1932), 338. For Stoddard’s long and approvingly prefaced transcriptions from Colcord’s article, see *ibid.*, 255, 311-12.

<sup>17</sup> Jon Thares Davidann, *Cultural Diplomacy in U.S.–Japanese Relations, 1919–1941* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 139.

<sup>18</sup> Doenecke and Wilz, *From Isolation to War*, 40.

that matter, in 1918 regarding the invasion of Siberia. The value of the conflict in his eyes was simply in its putting the lie to the myth that a “new world” had been born out of either Versailles, the League, or the much-touted multilateral non-aggression pacts of the 1920s. In reality, the old world had never died at all, and its principles only – the balance of power, the build-up of armaments, and “the philosophy of force” – still defined “the life of nations.”<sup>19</sup>

Strikingly, Colcord had little to say about the United States’ connection to the Manchurian conflict. America, he wrote, was “the only genuine friend of China” in the diplomatic world, but this was for no more noble a reason than it had more to lose economically from the closing of the Open Door than any of the other great powers. And even in making this claim, he made no mention at all of Secretary of State Henry Stimson’s January announcement of a new U.S. policy of non-recognition for Japan’s gains or any other international changes made by force. But ultimately, as Colcord himself made so clear, the struggle between Japan and China was one which they alone could truly settle. His position was that the United States should not attempt to meddle in their affairs on that core principle, for if it tried, it would bear the responsibility for setting East Asia and potentially the whole world “on fire.”<sup>20</sup> This, in the end, was his basis for an American policy of strict non-involvement, and this was the policy which he would continue to promote with even greater ardor as new crises threatened to lure the United States into war.

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<sup>19</sup> Colcord, “The Realism of Japanese Diplomacy,” 521-22. A very recent history of post-World War I internationalism comes to precisely the opposite conclusion of Colcord’s in 1932. Hathaway and Shapiro argue that the League of Nations and the Kellogg-Briand Pact were revolutionary legal steps toward the “outlawry” of war itself. They further argue that by the League’s members’ acceptance of the Stimson Doctrine of nonrecognition as their own, those nations had technically “renounced the most ancient right of sovereignty: the right of conquest. For the first time in international relations, Might would no longer make Right.” Oona Hathaway and Scott J. Shapiro, *The Internationalists: How a Radical Plan to Outlaw War Remade the World* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 2017), 169.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 524.

Yet in the interim, Colcord's interest in world affairs waned as fast as it waxed. For the remainder of 1932 and up to the end of 1935, domestic politics preoccupied him. As a registered Democrat, he duly endorsed and voted for Franklin Roosevelt along with the Party's candidates for the Maine governorship and his congressional district – Louis Brann and Edward Moran, respectively.<sup>21</sup> All three candidates won their 1932 elections. But from almost the moment those victories were confirmed, Colcord expected his votes to pay a dividend. In January 1933, he put his name forward for a \$6400 per year patronage position that could be awarded only by appointment from the president: Collector of Customs for Portland, Maine. But despite his intensive lobbying efforts, the better-connected state Democratic Chairman John Dooley was the natural victor in the struggle for the Collectorship.<sup>22</sup> This was not the last time Colcord would seek patronage from the Democratic Party. Twice more he would vie for jobs within or affiliated with the Roosevelt administration – in June 1934 for the role of secretary to the Chairman of the new Securities and Exchange Commission, and in January 1935 for a position in the government of the U.S. Virgin Islands. Twice more he was rejected. It is no coincidence that Colcord's antipathy towards the FDR grew after each of those later failed attempts. Yet foiled ambitions were only a marginal factor in his evolving position on Roosevelt.

Colcord was never enthusiastic about the man politically. He remained so even after a long interview with the president on November 7, 1933 for a lead article in former Brain Trust-member Raymond Moley's news magazine, *Today*, where Colcord was employed as a staff

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<sup>21</sup> He confided his reasoning to his father-in-law on the day before the election: "The tariff is the only issue that interests me; that is really my only reason for being a Democrat. I believe if we don't knock down our own and world tariffs we are heading for trouble. I have no doubt that Roosevelt will be overwhelmingly elected tomorrow, an opinion I haven't changed for the past year." LC to Morgan Brooks, November 7, 1932, Box 3 Folder 48.

<sup>22</sup> All the details of this scheme can be found in the folders of Colcord's intense correspondence with Congressman Edward Moran and Governor Louis Brann, his principle backers within the Maine Democratic Party. For Moran, see CFA Box 26 Folder 644. For Brann, see CFA Box 8 Folder 106.

writer for the first few months of its existence.<sup>23</sup> The article was the embodiment of a puff piece, praising Roosevelt to the rafters for his personal qualities of “seamanship” while scrupulously avoiding actual policy issues.<sup>24</sup> This approach was no doubt necessary to conform with *Today*’s pro-FDR and pro-New Deal editorial line.<sup>25</sup> Privately, however, Colcord was dogged by skepticism about the new leader and his policies. The talk at the meeting was “[m]ostly about sailing on the Maine coast,” he wrote to his father-in-law, “but incidentally we talked of foreign policy and all the rest of it – a fine and friendly conversation... I liked the President personally very much; but I guess I am too old to be carried away by a man’s ideas just because he is President.”<sup>26</sup>

This was a candid admission, and one all too true for the now fifty-year-old writer. It was also true that the long shadow of Woodrow Wilson blackened Colcord’s vision as he observed the new executive’s progress. “Look out for that fellow [FDR],” he wrote to a friend on the Consumer Advisory Board who was his inside man in pursuit of the SEC job, “don’t follow him too blindly. I’ve followed one trimmer over the dam, and I don’t propose to make the trip a second time.”<sup>27</sup> Indeed, he did not, but it was another kind of trip that gave him the final push in the direction he was clearly drifting. The true opening wedge for Colcord’s break with Roosevelt was his passionate objection to the social and economic impact of the New Deal.

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<sup>23</sup> The White House logbook records that Colcord and Moley remained with Roosevelt in the Oval Office from 9 pm to ten before midnight, the President’s last and longest meeting of the day. “November 7, 1933,” FDR: Day by Day, accessed March 13, 2018, URL: <http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/daybyday/daylog/november-7th-1933/>. Moley abruptly dismissed Colcord from the staff of *Today* in January 1934, citing budget tightening as the reason. Though he left the door open to submit pieces on a freelance basis, Colcord never took that offer up and resented him bitterly through the years that followed. Raymond Moley to LC, January 16, 1934, CFA Box 39 Folder 830.

<sup>24</sup> Lincoln Colcord, “Roosevelt: Seaman President,” *Today* 1, No. 7 (December 9, 1933), 3-5.

<sup>25</sup> Media less friendly to the administration easily ridiculed the claim in *Today*’s subtitle, “An *Independent* National Weekly,” as a misnomer. “Floating the New Deal,” *The Saturday Review* 10, No. 16 (November 4, 1933), 232.

<sup>26</sup> LC to Morgan Brooks, November 9, 1933, CFA Box 3 Folder 48.

<sup>27</sup> LC to Gardner Jackson, July 4, 1934, CFA Box 11 Folder 223.

He based his position on firsthand experience. In the fall of 1934, Colcord was contracted by the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) to do a “field survey” of relief efforts in some of the industrial cities of Michigan and Ohio.<sup>28</sup> From late October into early December, he travelled into those economically devastated states and spoke with executives in the auto industry, local social workers responsible for distributing relief, ordinary citizens, and less frequently, the unemployed themselves. Colcord’s final report to the FERA chief Harry Hopkins found that, based on his interviews and observations, federal “work relief” programs were undermining the recovery of private enterprise and were fostering the birth of new class of people who would be permanently dependent on government aid.<sup>29</sup> Neither of these results boded well for American democracy or the American economic system in Colcord’s eyes. Before his survey even ended, he wrote *Harper’s* to test the ground for an article knocking the “Frankenstein’s monster” that was the federal relief program. He admitted frankly that “all my views tend in a conservative rather than a radical direction” but also that he struggled to understand which way the New Deal itself was trending; it “really is utterly haywire in its social and economic implications.”<sup>30</sup>

Colcord’s experience as an old liberal who quickly soured on FDR and his program conforms with the thesis of a dated but important study of exactly that subject, Otis L. Graham’s

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<sup>28</sup> Although the exact route by which Colcord got this temporary job is unclear, the likeliest cause lies with his older sister Joanna. A prominent social worker since the 1910s, by 1934 she was a leading employee of the massively-endowed philanthropic organization, the Russell Sage Foundation, and a published author on the subject of cash relief. She was also an earnest supporter of the New Deal from the outset and, by her brother’s account, knew the FERA chief Harry Hopkins personally. LC to Gardner Jackson, June 4, 1934, CFA Box 11 Folder 223.

<sup>29</sup> Colcord’s weekly letters to Hopkins and his final report of December 3<sup>rd</sup> can be found in CFA Box 16 Folder 445. For an admirable summary of Colcord activities on his relief survey, and for a useful comparison with the work of other FERA field surveyors, see William R. Brock, *Welfare, Democracy, and the New Deal* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 263-66. Although Colcord believed that Hopkins never made any real use of his reports, Brock notes that his final report just those of the other surveyors was, in fact, forwarded by Hopkins to the President on December 10, 1934. *Ibid.*, 263.

<sup>30</sup> LC to Lee Hartman, November 23, 1934, CFA Box 38 Folder 823.

*An Encore for Reform*. In his survey of 168 prominent Progressive Era reformers who lived through all six years of the New Deal (Colcord was not among them), Graham concluded that opposition to the New Deal was more common than support. The “old reformers” who survived into the 1930s were generally daunted by the pace and scope of the new spirit of reform; “Liberalism, as the New Dealers practiced it, required adventures in federal regulation and planning, in class politics and novel economics, that postdated progressivism and found most progressives reluctant to go along.”<sup>31</sup> Moreover, Graham’s cliometric analysis of a smaller sample of his old reformers found that those with backgrounds in Progressive Era journalism (like Colcord) were markedly inclined to opposition at a rate of more than four to one.<sup>32</sup>

Graham’s admitted weakness to his survey was the deliberate omission of the old liberals’ reactions to Roosevelt’s foreign policy. He recognized that many of his subjects – including Senator Hiram Johnson and Amos Pinchot, both friends and correspondents of Colcord – fell in with “the isolationist tide” around 1938, when FDR became more assertive in pushing the United States onto the international scene. But Graham also reiterated that their “disillusionment with domestic liberalism,” the real focus of his study, “actually began much earlier than Roosevelt’s move towards involvement in the European situation.”<sup>33</sup> This was certainly true in Lincoln Colcord’s case as well. Useful for filling that gap left by Graham, then,

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<sup>31</sup> Otis L. Graham, Jr., *An Encore for Reform? The Old Progressives and the New Deal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 120. Alan Dawley, by contrast, takes an opposing position. He argues that “Roosevelt’s populist rhetoric and liberal reforms stole enough thunder to make the New Deal palatable to progressives” and that in the face of the national crisis, “New Deal reformers only had to pick up where the progressives left off” in moving America along towards a “managerial” liberal state. Alan Dawley, *Struggles for Justice: Social Responsibility and the Liberal State* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991), 388, 411.

<sup>32</sup> Graham, *An Encore for Reform*, 197. Graham’s analysis also found that old Progressives with a background in social work – like Colcord’s older sister Joanna – supported the New Deal at a rate of more than four to one, a perfect inversion. His sample for this group, however, was a meager ten people compared with 27 for the journalists. It ought to be noted, too, that Graham’s total sample of 100 for his cliometrics section was slightly heavier with registered Republicans than Democrats (55 to 37), thus creating the danger of a partisan skew.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

is a comparison of Colcord's experience with that of John T. Flynn, another self-described liberal and prominent columnist with a background in investigative journalism during the late Progressive Era. According to his biographer John Moser, Flynn was initially a strong supporter of the New Deal and a federally planned economy in general. But after 1935, growing concerns about fiscal irresponsibility and the potential for totalitarianism posed by an over-powerful central government eroded his enthusiasm. It was gone by 1938, and this was precisely the year when Flynn also turned towards isolationist opposition to the President's foreign policy as well.<sup>34</sup>

Flynn's story, like Colcord's, shows the natural (though far from absolute) connection between early opposition to FDR's domestic policies and later opposition to his foreign policy. But in contrast to Flynn, Colcord's opposition to Roosevelt's – and, indeed, to Congress' – foreign policy was born much earlier than 1938. His began in 1935, from the moment when American involvement in a new foreign war arose once more as a real possibility.

### **Changing Course, 1935-1939**

In January 1935, President Roosevelt announced his proposal for a new, \$5 billion relief bill. It was the first step towards his Second New Deal, and the final straw for Lincoln Colcord.<sup>35</sup> Although he remained a registered Democrat and a self-described liberal for the rest of his life, those terms could no longer be used without qualification. Now he was an “old-line Democrat,” a “true liberal,” and above all, an open opponent of the President and his program for America.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> John E. Moser, *Right Turn: John T. Flynn and the Transformation of American Liberalism* (New York: NYU Press, 2005), 60-62, 88-90.

<sup>35</sup> That “new relief policy” was “a huge and vicious log rolling machine for swinging the 1936 elections,” but recent history made him confident of the right outcome. “I think the same general situation is coming about that happened during the World War with respect to Wilson. Roosevelt's half-arsed liberalism is going to get nowhere and will be repudiated by the country.” LC to Raymond Gram Swing, January 26, 1935, CFA Box 15 Folder 409.

<sup>36</sup> Rossinow notes that as FDR seized the mantle of American liberalism, liberals with individualist, small government, libertarian bents struggled to distinguish their outlook as a redoubt of “true liberalism.” Doug Rossinow, *Visions of Progress: The Left-Liberal Tradition in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 112. Likewise, certain New Deal-opponents like Herbert Hoover and Albert J. Nock (whose magazine,

Through the early months of 1935, Colcord made his change public with a string of speaking events across eastern Maine – from the Penobscot Bay to Bangor and from the University of Maine in Orono all the way to Houlton (a town 150 miles north of his Searsport home).<sup>37</sup>

Where Colcord's ferocious criticism of the Roosevelt administration lulled was on the score of foreign policy. There was a long hiatus between his last full-length exposition on foreign affairs in early 1932 and his next in late 1935. Just as before, it took another radical shock to the international order to catch his attention and incite him to respond. This was the Italian-Ethiopian War, a conflict which boiled for months before finally exploding on October 3<sup>rd</sup>. It was this war's menacing prelude which stirred Congress as well, prompting the passage of the first Neutrality Act in August as measure to keep the United States out before it even started.<sup>38</sup> The Act was in no small part a response to a public demand for national security in a time of growing world unrest. The exact extent of interwar Americans' commitment to "isolationism" is an intensely debated point. But if (as Justus Doenecke and Manfred Jonas assert) that term is simply meant to mean opposition to involvement in foreign wars and to "collective security" schemes like the League of Nations, then by the mid-1930s its strength was real and recognizable.<sup>39</sup>

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*The Freeman*, Colcord had published in during the early 1920s) sometimes went by the label "true liberal" to avoid being tagged as "conservative," which carried negative connotations prior to the 1950s. Jerome Himmelstein, *To the Right: The Transformation of American Conservatism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 26.

<sup>37</sup> "Depression Is Over, Maine Author Thinks," *Bangor Daily News* (January 23, 1935). "Noted Author Scores Federal Relief Policy," *Bangor Daily News* (February 14, 1935). "Lincoln Colcord, Well Know Author, Finds Fault With New Deal In Address Here," *Houlton Pioneer-Times* (February 23, 1935). "Communism, Fascism Rapped By Colcord," *The Maine Campus* 36, No. 23 (April 25, 1935), 4.

<sup>38</sup> The heart of the Act was a mandatory ban on exports of war materiel to belligerents on both sides of a conflict once the President recognized their state of war. Doenecke and Wilz, *From Isolation to War*, 59-60.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4. Manfred Jonas, *Isolationism in America, 1935-1941* (Chicago: Imprint Publications, 1990), 22-23. For additional scholars on the affirmative side of this point, that isolationism was the dominant sentiment in the country by the mid-1930s, see Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 101-02, Ronald E. Powaski, *Toward an Entangling Alliance: American Isolationism, Internationalism, and Europe, 1901-1950* (New York: Green Wood Press, 1991), 218, and Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream*, 177. For two counterpoints against exaggerating the strength of isolationist sentiment between the wars, consider Thomas Guinsburg, *The Pursuit of Isolationism in the United States Senate from Versailles to Pearl Harbor* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1982) and Cecelia Lynch, *Beyond*



Colcord's reaction to the outbreak of war filled three columns of the *New York Herald-Tribune's* opinion page – a letter to the editor of near-article length. But despite that ample space, the nation of Ethiopia did not factor into his thinking at all. Italy and its regional great power rival, Britain, were the only parties of concern. The tension between the two was a “struggle of imperial destinies” and nothing more. Colcord was emphatic that “the moral issue” had no place in the equation. Hence the “moral pressure” of milquetoast sanctions imposed by the League was yet another empty threat that could do nothing to halt Italy's course of action or stave off its looming show-down with Britain; “any realist knows that they simply will not work.” Both countries “ought not to want to fight” one another, of course, but on the Italian side at least, forces beyond pragmatic pacifism were already at work. Compelled by a “manifest destiny” just as Britain had been in the century past, Italy would have to fight for its “place in the sun... That is the way every nation, including the United States, has reached its present boundaries.”<sup>40</sup>

This cold-blooded analysis of the East African crisis had the same intended function as his take on the Manchurian conflict. Colcord was showing his American readers how they needed to look at foreign wars if they really wanted to keep out of them. The “realist” point of view *was* the “neutral” point of view precisely because “it faces reality on both sides” and takes neither of them as its own. Colcord personally hoped that Mussolini would tread carefully with Britain and that there would be no great power war. “But if war must come,” he warned, “we would help nothing and ruin much, as we did in the World War, by allowing ourselves to be drawn in.” He offered the American public this sobering advice:

American opinion should strive first to put itself in the mind of an Englishman, thinking of the protection of his far-flung empire, and second into the mind of an Italian, thinking

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*Appeasement: Interpreting Interwar Peace Movements in World Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).

<sup>40</sup> Lincoln Colcord, “A Struggle Between Imperial Destinies,” *New York Herald-Tribune* (October 16, 1935).

of his ancient imperial heritage and chafing under what feels to be an unfair national limitation. Then, in an honestly neutral frame of mind, aware that it had nothing to do with making the trouble, convinced that the self-interest of the United States is nowhere involved, it should withhold its hand and wait for the outcome. By doing so it would render the best service to humanity in the long run.<sup>41</sup>

In an outstanding study of the ideology of interwar American isolationism, historian Ross Kennedy notes that many isolationists had a “realist” appraisal of international affairs as being defined by “power politics,” cited the First World War as the prime example of the futility of American involvement in Europe’s perpetual squabbling, and ultimately based their foreign policy goals on the self-interest of their own country.<sup>42</sup> Each of these characteristics is visible in full force in the writing of Lincoln Colcord. But what is unique in his case is his conception of neutrality and his additional justification for American non-involvement. Neutrality as Colcord defined it was less a policy than a state of mind. As such, it was not just the responsibility of the State (or more specifically, the State Department, rather than Congress) to diplomatically ensure it. Neutrality was a fundamental duty for the American people themselves to uphold as they observed events abroad. But as a country with undeniable power on the world stage, the United States as a state also had a duty in Colcord’s eyes. Worse than just futile, its role in the Great War was disastrous all around. It exacerbated the conflict where it was actually fought, and its diplomatic fumbling had helped erect an unjust and unsustainable postwar peace settlement. Neither America nor the world could afford to repeat that colossal national mistake.

The Anglo-Italian war over East Africa never materialized, but Colcord remained uneasy about America’s prospects for staying out of other potential wars. In late 1935 and early 1936, he began following the activities of Congress on U.S. foreign relations more closely, particularly the

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid. This final paragraph was impressive enough to warrant transcription *in toto* for a 1936 compilation of articles on the still broiling issue of American neutrality. *The Neutrality Policy of the United States*, compiled by Julia E. Johnson, (New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1936), 184.

<sup>42</sup> Ross Kennedy, “The Ideology of American Isolationism, 1931-1939,” *Cercles* 5 (2002), 57-76.

tail-end of the Senate's "Nye Committee" investigating the entry of the United States into the First World War. Colcord showed little interest in the Committee's most famous finding – that American bankers and munitions makers played an outsized role in drawing the country into the Great War. Instead, he was most struck by the sheer hollowness of the Wilson administration's claims to neutrality from the war's outset. In mid-January, he merged his old indignation at that historical failure with a new rage against FDR's personal proposal to expand presidential embargo power from all belligerents flatly, as the 1935 Neutrality Act prescribed, to specific ones whom he designated as "aggressors."<sup>43</sup> In January 1936, in another broadside for the *Herald-Tribune*, he let loose his thoughts on American neutrality's past and future.

Colcord admitted frankly that "since the dawn of modern history neutrality has been a matter of give-and-take and dog-eat-dog." No nation, not even America, had ever upheld the principle "consistently" in the face of appeals and pressure by belligerents. So it had been nineteen years prior. Yet the fact of the matter was that the United States in 1917 "possessed complete economic power over the situation" in Europe and could have successfully asserted a "strict neutrality" had it the will and the leadership. But both were lacking, and "bowing to Allied policy" it lurched into the conflict against its own "self-interest." The same error was being repeated "in even more drastic form" today. Neither the Neutrality Act nor the President's selective embargo principle were a defense of American neutrality, but rather, its abrogation. True neutrals could not take sides between nations at war and at peace any more than they could take sides between the opposing belligerents themselves. "We should say that we will not be drawn into any European war," Colcord wrote, "but that the one thing we will fight for will be

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<sup>43</sup> Isolationist opposition in the Senate insured that the President did not gain quite that degree of discretionary power. The second Neutrality Act, passed on February 29, 1936, was largely an extension of the first. Wayne S. Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists, 1932-1945* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 183-86.

our neutrality.” Such a course “cannot stop war itself,” he conceded, but by neither joining the fray nor taking sides “we could stop war from descending to the standards of the jungle.”<sup>44</sup>

This stirring article drew Colcord into the center of a distinct subgroup of American isolationists, variously described as “traditionalists” who wanted to “preserve conventional neutral rights” (per Wayne Cole) and “belligerent” isolationists who favored the strictest kind of unilateralism in foreign affairs (per Manfred Jonas).<sup>45</sup> In Washington, the leaders of this group were Senators William Borah of Idaho and Hiram Johnson of California – both Republicans, old progressives, and “Irreconcilables” who had led the opposition to U.S. ratification of the Treaty of Versailles. Colcord knew both these men from his own Washington years and had supported their anti-Versailles insurgency in 1919 from the pages of *The Nation*. Now he revived the connection in the service of a new fight for American non-entanglement in an unstable world. Colcord wrote both men to praise their actions in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC) criticizing the proposed second Neutrality Act. He also prompted them to read his recent piece in the *Herald-Tribune* on that subject of mutual concern.<sup>46</sup> Johnson (whom Colcord had developed a closer connection to in 1919 than Borah) responded very favorably, even promising that he would insert the article into the Congressional Record as he had done with pieces by other commentators who shared his point of view.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Lincoln Colcord, “The Shifting Standards of Neutrality,” *New York Herald-Tribune* (January 27, 1936).

<sup>45</sup> Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists*, 163. Jonas, *Isolationism in America*, 35. Jonas also describes this group as “international law isolationists.” *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>46</sup> LC to William Borah, January 16, 1936, CFA Box 7 Folder 95. LC to Hiram Johnson, February 2, 1936, CFA Box 11 Folder 226.

<sup>47</sup> Hiram Johnson to Lincoln Colcord, February 6, 1936, CFA Box 11 Folder 226. Johnson apparently did not follow through on this promise. Borah, for his part, reacted to Colcord’s line of thought with some confusion, reading his views in a long letter Colcord wrote him on January 14<sup>th</sup> that formed the basic draft of the *Herald-Tribune* piece. “Just what would you put into a measure to achieve what you deem neutrality,” Borah asked? Colcord’s reply was a simple one, building off his position of October 1935. “I do not think neutrality is a fit subject for legislation at all. I do not believe a neutrality bill can be drawn up that would not cause more trouble than it corrected.” William Borah to LC, January 18, 1936, CFA Box 7 Folder 95. LC to William Borah, January 20, 1936, CFA Box 7 Folder 95.

The January *Herald-Tribune* piece also made Colcord two new contacts in the field of international law. The public intellectual counterparts to Borah and Johnson were John Bassett Moore, Assistant Secretary of State under William McKinley and the first American judge to serve on the World Court, and Edwin Borchard, a professor at Yale University Law School. Both men had recently appeared before the SFRC to give testimony at the behest of their isolationist allies in the Senate, and Colcord was deeply impressed with their arguments and conviction.<sup>48</sup> Borchard and Moore's biographer notes that the two men shared a "realist" philosophy for international relations that was in perfect accord with Colcord's. They were staunch advocates of traditional neutrality and opponents of intervention in foreign wars that ran counter to the United States' self-interest. They were highly critical of the Treaty of Versailles and dismissed the possibility of a world without war as a fantasy. And they resented Woodrow Wilson for poisoning American public opinion with vacuous idealism that blinded them to the unchanging realities of world affairs.<sup>49</sup> In that last respect, Colcord found much needed outlets for venting his own bitter feelings. "I attribute the disintegration of American thought chiefly to Woodrow Wilson," Colcord wrote Moore. "Wilson was intellectually dishonest, and he succeeded in some curious cosmic way of imposing his intellectual dishonesty on the thought and even the policy of the country ever since. Until we emancipate ourselves from the Wilson conception of liberalism, we will not be able to think straight again."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Colcord also thrilled to have the intellectual company. Replying to a highly complementary letter from Borchard about his recent *Herald-Tribune* letters, Colcord confided that "I have been awfully lonely, really, and have felt at times that my peculiar views, which seemed the only possible views to me, were not shared by anyone else. It's fine to recognize that you feel exactly the same way." LC to Edwin Borchard, April 8, 1936, CFA Box 7 Folder 96.

<sup>49</sup> Justus Doenecke, "Edwin M. Borchard, John Bassett Moore, and Opposition to American Intervention in World War II," *Journal of Libertarian Studies* 6, No. 1 (1982), 1–34.

<sup>50</sup> LC to John Bassett Moore, February 25, 1936, CFA Box 12 Folder 299.

This was Colcord's ultimate goal, and in the process of fighting for it, he further enmeshed himself into this neutralist-isolationist cohort. Prompted to write once more by a Walter Lippmann column defending the Locarno Treaty,<sup>51</sup> his focus for his next *Herald-Tribune* op-ed shifted to the actual effects of Locarno, Kellogg-Briand (the other illustrious non-aggression pact of the 1920s), and the Versailles Treaty. As the title of the piece – “Treaties That Are Foredoomed to Failure” – suggests, he considered all three of them illegitimate from their inception. The reigning discord in world affairs was not an “evil” anomaly, but the logical reaction of “strong national forces” in revolt against an untenable status quo. Once again, Colcord insisted that “relations between nations are not and cannot be arranged on a purely moral basis.” Instead, they could only be based on “mutual self-interest and the competitive spirit of nationalism.” Any treaties which were not premised on this reality, as were Versailles and its “stopgap” successors Locarno and Kellogg-Briand, were “bound to be violated and should be violated, for they are wrong treaties arranged by wrong leaders for wrong purposes.”<sup>52</sup>

Eugene Davidson, editor of the Yale University Press, read this letter to the *Herald-Tribune*. Impressed by the piece and with recommendations from his colleague Borchard and from Storer Lunt (an executive at the W.W. Norton publishing house and one of Colcord's New York City friends), Davidson freely inquired if there was “any chance of getting a book from you” on the current issue of neutrality.<sup>53</sup> As it so happened, Colcord had mused on and off for several years about putting together a book of his own experiences during the World War, one he planned to serve partly a personal history and also an analysis of the relationship between

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<sup>51</sup> Walter Lippmann, “Today and Tomorrow,” *New York Herald-Tribune* (March 12, 1936).

<sup>52</sup> Lincoln Colcord, “Treaties That Are Foredoomed to Failure,” *New York Herald-Tribune* (March 20, 1936).

<sup>53</sup> Eugene Davidson to LC, March 20, 1936, CFA Box 15 Folder 439.

Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House.<sup>54</sup> Tragically, though, he never got farther than rough notes for this extremely promising endeavor.<sup>55</sup> And despite his recognition of the growing war danger that America faced, he made no attempt at all to produce a monograph about neutrality. While he loathed what he saw as the capitulation of American intellectuals to FDR's "amorphous liberalism," and resented the failure of the press to hit the President with harder criticism, he explained his deliberate inaction to Davidson as a matter of *blasé* confidence.

I have a strong faith in the potentialities of American opinion. To my mind, the outstanding historical fact of World War diplomacy was that America refused to ratify the Treaty [of Versailles]. That meant that American public opinion, pushed to the wall, had a better mass sense of the diplomatic realities than did Woodrow Wilson and all the statesmen of Europe. I believe American opinion today could easily be brought to support the point of view that you and Professor Borchard and I have in common, though only a handful of people hold that point of view today. I believe this is the native American opinion, the one that satisfies American common-sense... [but] as it is, it seemed best for me to stay here, try to get my views into the Herald-Tribune, and keep up a friendly correspondence with Senators Borah and Johnson, John Bassett Moore, and others who are on the firing line... [In any event,] Spring is coming and I've got to plant the garden besides. *The world isn't worth trying to save at the expense of letting your garden go – because you can't save it anyway.* I got over that idea quite a long time ago.<sup>56</sup>

Colcord had more than his garden in mind, of course; he was increasingly busy as 1936 wore on. He was at the beginning stages of organizing the Penobscot Marine Museum in his hometown of Searsport, a grand monument to the maritime history of Maine that would become his greatest pride and joy.<sup>57</sup> He was also occupied with a series in the *Portland Sunday Telegram* promoting the life and work of living Maine authors, including Robert Tristram Coffin, Kenneth

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<sup>54</sup> He described the project vividly to Edwin Borchard. "You have no idea what telling stuff I have in my locker. I want to call the book 'Wilson and House,' and write it in reminiscent-narrative form, letting the documents carry it as far as possible. I want to present a new conception of Wilson, and a new interpretation of our war diplomacy; one that hasn't yet got into print, I mean." LC to Edwin Borchard, April 8, 1936, CFA Box 7 Folder 96.

<sup>55</sup> CFA Box 23 Folder 594 "Notes."

<sup>56</sup> LC to Eugene Davidson, March 31, 1936, CFA Box 15 Folder 439. Emphasis added.

<sup>57</sup> "Author in a Vivid Plea for a Sea Memorial," *Bangor Daily News* (January 8, 1936). "Marine Museum Started in Searsport, Me.," *New York Herald Tribune* (November 5, 1936).

Roberts, and Colcord's own sister Joanna.<sup>58</sup> But even after all that, there is no reason to doubt his sincerity. As much as the prospect of American involvement in another war filled him with dread, he could still muster up confidence that the American people would stem the danger as they had in 1919. It was only after FDR's landslide reelection in November 1936 that Colcord's angst about the United States' course prompted him to take new action as commentator.<sup>59</sup>

His fear for America was a response to trends in both domestic and foreign affairs, and in early 1937, Colcord saw dangers on those fronts rising in tandem. In his correspondence through 1935 and 1936, he had casually derided FDR as a "demagogue" in the vein of Father Coughlin and Huey Long, but also forecast his inevitable political demise. Reality proved the opposite of that over-confident prediction. In February 1937, the newly reelected Roosevelt brazenly moved to expand his authority with a radical new bill that would have empowered him to add a new Justice to the Supreme Court for every sitting one over the age of 70. Opinion in the press, in Congress, and among much of the public ran strongly against this "Court packing plan" from the outset; "dictatorship" was a common refrain. The strongest single source of opposition came from New York newspaper magnate Frank Gannett's "National Committee to Uphold

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<sup>58</sup> Lincoln Colcord, "Sunday Telegram to Conduct Symposium of Maine Authors – Attempt to Show True Importance of State in World Literature," *Portland Sunday Telegram* (May 31, 1936).

<sup>59</sup> Post-election, Colcord confided to his daughter Inez – now a young student at the Strayer Business College in Washington, D.C. – that excepting the state of Maine which once more went Republican (as did Colcord for the first time since 1904, when he cast his first vote for Theodore Roosevelt), the national results came as true shock to him. "It was this something-for-nothing philosophy that Roosevelt has caught the country with, that brought the landslide. I didn't think the American people could be bought, but they can. I don't mean bought by money, but by a dream that appeals nevertheless to material self-interest – a dream of a better world, meaning one in which everyone will have a better car. All this longing for 'security' is along the same lines. The Federal Govt. must give everyone 'security.' That's a new idea in America – and America gave it a landslide." LC to Inez Colcord, November 13, 1936 [mislabelled "1937"], CFA Box 5 Folder 63.



Constitutional Government,” a pressure group coordinating sympathetic citizens to flood Congressional offices with letters and telegrams urging the bill be stopped in its tracks.<sup>60</sup>

Colcord was directly and enthusiastically affiliated with the Gannett Committee.<sup>61</sup> Following its lead, he wrote Senators Borah and Johnson, Senator Arthur Vandenberg, Senator Henrik Shipstead, and Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandies railing against the bill and encouraging them to stand firm in opposition to it. He made the ultimate danger plain in another long op-ed for the *Herald-Tribune* in February. The President’s plan was indeed a step towards legalizing “dictatorship,” but its essence was an entirely familiar one. FDR’s attempt to alter the shape of American government was “exactly parallel in psychological terms” to Wilson’s push for the ratification of the Versailles Treaty in 1919. In both instances a man who could not take “adverse criticism,” who was riven with “delusions of grandeur” and a “messianic complex,” who believed that “the fate of humanity hangs on [his] word,” was again asking to be given “unlimited authority” on the grounds of his own supreme wisdom and the exigencies of the moment. Fusing his external-oriented isolationism with his internal-oriented conservatism, Colcord made a hopeful prediction. “The American people will not subscribe to the destruction of their democracy, just as, in the case of the Treaty of Versailles, they would not subscribe to participation in European dangers beyond their control.”<sup>62</sup>

Through the critical months of March through May – the period when both the Court bill and a third, permanent Neutrality Act were under intense debate – Colcord enjoyed a burst of

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<sup>60</sup> Jeff Shesol, *Supreme Power: Franklin Roosevelt vs. The Supreme Court* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011), 302-05.

<sup>61</sup> For Colcord’s correspondence with the Committee itself, see CFA Box 32 Folder 722. Colcord took up the organized crusade against the court packing bill so adamantly that he earned a mention in Gannett’s authorized biography, published hastily in 1948 when he was running for the Republican Presidential nomination. Samuel T. Williamson, *Imprint of a Publisher: The Story of Frank Gannett and his Independent Newspapers* (New York: Robert M. McBride & Co., 1948), 245.

<sup>62</sup> Lincoln Colcord, “Proposing a Return to Lawlessness,” *New York Herald-Tribune* (February 19, 1937).

good fortune when he was given a bi-weekly column in the *Portland Sunday Telegram*. With free rein to write on subjects of his choosing, he thus had a regular (if highly local) platform from which to press home the imminent dangers facing the American nation. Though the threat of “dictatorship” posed by the Court bill began to ebb by May, the simultaneous passage of that new Neutrality Act drew heavy fire from Colcord’s column. He was particularly incensed by its “cash-and-carry” provision which allowed to the sale of non-military goods to belligerents in conflicts of the President’s choosing as long as they were bought with cash and carried on a belligerent’s own ships.<sup>63</sup> This was not just another evasion of “the basic principle of neutrality” – not taking sides – in the abstract. It was “a definite alignment” of the United States with Great Britain and France, the nations which had the cash and controlled the seas. War clouds were on the horizon in Europe, and the passage of this Act had predetermined America’s course. Colcord was emphatic, “we are involved in the next European war before it has even broken out.”<sup>64</sup>

We are just involved in it. Whenever and wherever it breaks out, we are on the side of the nations which control the seas. And you cannot take sides without eventually becoming a belligerent. One step leads to another; the nations controlling the seas would begin shipping supplies from America; the other nations, their enemies, would make what reprisals they could, against both them and America; very soon we would be forced to declare war.

Colcord was describing the actual process of America’s creeping intervention in the First World War. But at the same time, he was also anticipating the path of American involvement in the World War to come. The tragedy he saw there was worse than just the fading alternative, that America still could maintain a “strict neutrality” and save both herself and potentially Europe from war without limit (as it could have during the Great War). The tragedy was that ordinary Americans were forgetting the lesson of their own recent history. Once more they were allowing

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<sup>63</sup> Doenecke and Wilz, *From Isolation to War*, 67-68. Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists*, 232. The “cash-and-carry” provision was a temporary feature of the Act, and was fixed to expire in two years on May 1, 1939.

<sup>64</sup> Lincoln Colcord, “Fair Winds and Foul: The New Neutrality,” *Portland Sunday Telegram* (May 9, 1937).

themselves to succumb to the “sad illusion” that by yet another “unneutral policy” they might have the peace that only true neutrality could give.<sup>65</sup>

Remarkably, after the spring of 1937, Colcord went publicly silent on neutrality, FDR’s foreign policy, and world affairs in general. His final shots in those quarters were concentrated on defending a recent book by his friend Edwin Borchard, *Neutrality for the United States*, which was, in many respects, the monograph he had never been able to produce himself.<sup>66</sup> And yet, even a fall sailing cruise in the Caribbean with his friend Samuel Eliot Morrison could not distract Colcord entirely from foreign affairs.<sup>67</sup> “I fear most of all the projection of the United States into the international scene,” he wrote to Marion Martin, the Maine-born assistant chairwoman of the Republican National Committee. “If we were to become involved in war, all bets would be off. That is why the President’s Chicago speech [a speech calling for the “quarantine” of “aggressor” nations] gives me such a disquiet; I have been through all that during the World War as a journalist in Washington, and it is the same thing over again. Our pseudo-liberals who make political capital out of peace will be the first ones to lead us into war.”<sup>68</sup>

This was Colcord’s deepest fear of all – that the very same tragedy which he lived through and abetted during the Great War was looking ever more likely to be repeated *verbatim*. But despite more prompting, it would be over a year before he confronted that fear with a full-

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Colcord gave the book a laudatory review in the *Yale Review*, and aggressively attacked one of its detractors in a letter to the editor of *The Saturday Review*. Lincoln Colcord, “Neutrality Under International Law,” *Yale Review* 26, No. 4 (June 1937), 821-24. Lincoln Colcord, “Neutrality for the U.S.,” *The Saturday Review* 16, No. 6 (June 5, 1937), 9. Beyond the fact that he was in unqualified agreement with the book’s arguments about neutrality and the Great War, Colcord had another reason to defend the book as adamantly as he did. His March 1936 *Herald-Tribune* letter was approvingly quoted for its strong critique of the Kellogg-Briand Pact. Edwin M. Borchard and William Lage, *Neutrality for the United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937), 298.

<sup>67</sup> Henry Buxton, “Maine Historians Sail November 15,” *Bangor Daily News* (November 6, 1937).

<sup>68</sup> LC to Marion Martin, October 5, 1937, CFA Box 5 Folder 63.

length article.<sup>69</sup> Foreign events did not escape his attention, though, through that long period of inactivity in his political writing. In February 1938 while he was wintering in New York City and Washington, D.C., the ongoing Spanish Civil War filled him with such righteous indignation that he allowed a signed statement denouncing “Franco and Fascism” and declaring his sympathies with “Republican Spain” to be included in a book titled simply, *Writers Take Sides: Letters about the War in Spain from 418 American Authors*.<sup>70</sup>

There is an obvious irony to Lincoln Colcord unambiguously “taking sides” after spending several years denouncing that “unneutral” activity. He had not shown any such moral scruples when he followed the war in Manchuria or the hypothetical Anglo-Italian war over Ethiopia. On the contrary, he denied the presence of moral advantage on either side of those conflicts. But even in this truly unique case where sympathy got the better of him, Colcord never favored American involvement of any kind in the Spanish Civil War.<sup>71</sup> He shifted smoothly back into his hardline “realist” mode to respond to the other great crises of 1938. He accepted the German annexation of Austria and even the prospective annexation of Czechoslovakia as *fait accompli* before the latter deed was even done.<sup>72</sup> Hence when a real territorial dispute over the

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<sup>69</sup> Davidson pushed Colcord one last time in the summer of 1937 to convert his thoughts on neutrality into something that could be widely circulated and make a real impact; “we ought to shoot off one of our big guns, and you’re one of the biggest.” Eugene Davidson to LC, July 2, 1937, CFA Box 15 Folder 439. Colcord’s reply admitted that he had “wanted for a long time to get out a magazine article on my own view of neutrality,” but then blithely cited “commitments” with the budding Marine Museum and summer sailing with friends on the Penobscot Bay as his two priorities. LC to Eugene Davidson, July 5, 1937, CFA Box 15 Folder 439.

<sup>70</sup> *Writers Take Sides: Letters about the War in Spain from 418 American Authors* (Concord, NH: Rumford Press, 1938), 15. Colcord’s statement was an answer to a form letter sent out by the League of American Writers, a political group directly affiliated with the Communist Party USA. Colcord showed no indication of knowing this either when he wrote his response or after the fact. LC to Donald Ogden Stewart, February 8, 1938.

<sup>71</sup> Manfred Jonas notes that the Spanish Civil War created a “moral issue” that “liberals and radicals among the isolationists” struggled to explain away or ignore. The Socialist Norman Thomas, for instance, wrote Roosevelt personally to say that in spite of his preference for a flatly applied embargo against all belligerents, this was a conflict in which the United States simply had to give economic priority the government of Spain against the fascist insurgents. Jonas, *Isolationism in America*, 185-88.

<sup>72</sup> He mused to his wife: “The Nazi crowd in Austria were gaining – were more than an insignificant minority. Same in Czechoslovakia – 3,500,000 Germans there – Czechoslovakia will simply fall into Hitler’s net. The cards run that way. France won’t fight for Czechoslovakia because there won’t be anything to fight for. And Hitler will only be

Sudetenland in September brought Europe to the brink of another war, he held to a realistic expectation of the outcome; “England and France will give Hitler what he wants and there will be no general war. The Czechs may fight but I doubt it. It’s been an exciting time, however, I hope Roosevelt doesn’t make a fool of himself and horn in.”<sup>73</sup>

Colcord would soon have far more to fear than Roosevelt simply embarrassing himself. He could confide to his daughter a sense of morbid satisfaction at the outcome of the Munich Crisis; “if one thing is [now] plain to everyone in the world, it is that recent events have blasted the theory itself of collective security sky high. There is no collectiveness among nations any longer, and no security.”<sup>74</sup> But the President’s post-crisis reaction – calling for a \$500 million boost to federal defense spending – filled him once more with extreme concern. The new proposal also reminded Colcord of the real danger at hand: FDR’s existing discretionary power to apply wartime trade embargoes. This “isn’t neutrality at all,” he wrote, and “has nothing to do with it. To stop selling munitions and goods to one country and shoot them through to another is a war measure... Neutrality, of course, is something entirely different. It means the right to trade freely with both belligerents in a conflict, and insisting on this right as far as possible. That is, neutrality really means not taking sides. The present plan of the Administration obviously means taking sides, and taking sides is an act of war.”<sup>75</sup>

American participation in another European war remained Colcord’s paramount fear, and the post-Munich spike in FDR’s internationalist ambitions finally prompted him to put his total perspective to paper. Through January 1939 he labored on a new article dedicated to FDR’s

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following Wilson’s formula of the self-determination of peoples. What fools statesmen are.” LC to Frances Colcord, March 15, 1938, CFA Box 1 Folder 2.

<sup>73</sup> LC to Inez Colcord, September 10, 1938, CFA Box 5 Folder 67.

<sup>74</sup> LC to Inez Colcord, October 24, 1938, CFA Box 5 Folder 67.

<sup>75</sup> LC to Inez Colcord, November 30, 1938, CFA Box 5 Folder 65. Emphasis in the original.

foreign policy to date and to come. On the 27<sup>th</sup> he sent the piece, bluntly titled “American Foreign Policy,” to the *Saturday Evening Post*. In addition to being the highest circulation periodical in the country, historian Michael Zalampas notes that the *Post* was also among “the most staunchly isolationist” American magazines of the 1930s, upholding its anti-interventionist editorial line all the way up to Pearl Harbor.<sup>76</sup> “I feel very deeply about it,” Colcord confessed of his article to the *Post*’s editor, Wesley Strout, “and believe it to be a consistent outline of a point of view that isn’t being fully brought out.”<sup>77</sup> Nor was it to be brought out in the *Saturday Evening Post*; the article was declined. Although the work was thus left in Colcord’s hands alone, it nevertheless represents the fullest image of his isolationist worldview in peacetime.

Colcord alleged that Roosevelt and his allies were presenting a false image of American insecurity to breed “hysteria” among the public. The reasons were twofold. It was a means of restoring the administration’s political hold on the country as the New Deal stalled and FDR’s popularity wobbled. It was also a “trump card” for justifying his insatiable desire to concentrate more power in the hands of the Executive. While “Munich and the terrible suppression of the Jews,” a reference to Kristallnacht, had indeed “raised a moral issue of startling proportions,” the President was abandoning his duty as a statesman to look at foreign issues “coolly with an eye to national self-interest.” Instead, he stood only “on grounds of emotionalism,” and as a consequence, the country was “heading directly for war.” Such a course flew in the face of the realities of America’s position. “Nothing in the known world threatens the United States today.” Rather, “in sober truth, the chief threat against the institutions of the United States today is the

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<sup>76</sup> Michael Zalampas, *Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich in American Magazines, 1923-1939* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 132, 177, 216. Colcord was an enthusiastic consumer of the *Post* by at least 1939, and despite this rejection, by 1941 he was so pleased with its isolationist editorials written by Garret Garrett that he called it “the only paper in the country today that still dares to call its soul its own!” LC to Oswald Garrison Villard, January 8, 1941. Privately held. Courtesy of Professor Parker Albee, Falmouth, Maine.

<sup>77</sup> LC to Wesley Winans Strout, January 27, 1939, CFA Box 39 Folder 838.

present Administration in Washington... the real totalitarian dangers which threaten our democracy [come] from within.”<sup>78</sup>

Regardless of the increasingly loud insinuations from Roosevelt and parts of the press that America was threatened from without, the “complete hollowness of the war scare” was easily deflated. The proposition that Germany could or desired to “conquer the United States” was “an idea unworthy of adult mentality.” Technological limitations alone made the act impossible, as did geographic security. “The bare idea that Germany could set out across three-thousand miles of ocean to conquer the United States under these circumstances, or under any circumstances for that matter, is worthy only of a story in a pulp magazine.”<sup>79</sup> Colcord found Germany as unlikely to conquer South America as it was to conquer the North, and condemned Roosevelt’s “tactless” and “insulting” assumption that Latin countries were so totally helpless before a foreign power as just a contrived excuse for meddling in those nations’ affairs.<sup>80</sup>

Speaking for himself, Colcord asserted that his country had no responsibility whatsoever to check German or Japanese expansion in Europe and Asia. He conceded that while either could be “deplored to the utmost,” neither of were “within the sphere of American self-interest; it is not our function to correct the evils of the world.” The effective goal of current American foreign policy, then, if it was not to serve the national interest, was only to “fight the battles of Great

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<sup>78</sup> “American Foreign Policy,” MS, January 27, 1939, CFA Box 26 Folder 647, 1-4. The contrast between Colcord here and President Roosevelt in his 1939 State of the Union address is so stark it ought to be noted: “Events abroad have made it increasingly clear to the American people that dangers within are less to be feared than dangers from without. If, therefore, a solution of this problem of idle men and idle capital is the price of preserving our liberty, no formless selfish fears can stand in the way.” Franklin Roosevelt, “Annual Message to Congress – January 4, 1939,” accessed March 20, 2018, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=15684>

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 5-6. Colcord also shrewdly observed that Germany’s military forces were not constructed for a transatlantic war, but for the “European balance of power” and “expanding towards the east.” Germany’s “national self-interest heads in that direction, and does not cross or approach the self-interest of the United States at any point.” Likewise, he found it equally “foolish” to presume that “Japan, in the midst of her colossal enterprise in China, presents any threat to the United States.” Ibid., 12.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 8-10.

Britain once more, as we did in the World War.” The moral assertion that it was the United States’ duty “to stand with the democracies against the totalitarian nations,” ignored the disgraceful realities of British and French actions in Spain and Czechoslovakia, that “the democracies in Europe have stood neither for themselves nor democracy.” Concluding, Colcord asked his perennial isolationist question:

Nations save themselves; they are not to be saved by other nations... [Britain] has to straighten itself out along the lines of its own self-interest and on the basis of its own power. We might affect the issue for a moment, only at the expense of rolling up world disaster later on. The World War proved this beyond any question. By our entrance into the World War we saved nothing, and only succeeded in be-deviling every international relation. Must we plunge in again, knowing in advance that it is a vain enterprise, and be-devil the world once more?<sup>81</sup>

There are two distinguishing features of this article that set it apart from Colcord’s earlier pieces. The first is his concentration on President Roosevelt as the main determinant of U.S. foreign policy, rather than the Neutrality Act or the even American public opinion. The former was not mentioned at all, and the latter comes across almost as putty in FDR’s hands. The second is Colcord’s explicit the denial that there was any direct threat to the United States (or the Americas generally) from abroad, and specifically from Germany and Japan. This element stands in especially stark contrast with his writing from the previous seven years. In 1932 and in 1935-37, he never once felt the need to state outright that the United States was not threatened by other nations and was totally secure by virtue of its geography besides. The only danger he saw then had been America allowing itself to be dragged into to other nations’ wars half-blinded by “unneutral” legislation. The idea that his country or its leadership would actively choose war as a response to perceived threats abroad was never on his horizon.

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 13-15.



These new components of Colcord's isolationist platform had interconnected roots in the evolving political scene. No less a public figure than President Roosevelt himself saw dire military threats to the United States from "aggressor" nations and had made that fact known as early as his "quarantine" speech of October 1937.<sup>82</sup> The revelation in late January 1939 of plans orchestrated by U.S. Ambassador to France William Bullitt to supply that country with American military aircraft only illustrated the obvious favor of the administration towards the old Allied nations.<sup>83</sup> Cries about German economic influence in Latin America was also a rising concern by the start of 1939. Indeed, economic historian Patrick Hearden argues that it was this very real and growing trade competition that was seen as the primary foreign threat by key members of the State Department and by American business opinion.<sup>84</sup>

Colcord's isolationist thought was thus shifting in appropriate directions. The questions of national security threats from abroad and the President's power to guide U.S. foreign policy towards war were rapidly moving to the center of the interwar American foreign policy debate. Soon to come, they would be two of the dominant issues of that debate's second stage – the

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<sup>82</sup> Roosevelt's true position was revealed in early 1939, simultaneous with Colcord's attempt to publish his article. In mid-February, statements FDR allegedly made at a private conference with the Senate Military Affairs Committee in January – the most salacious of which was that "America's frontier was on the Rhine" – were leaked to the press. Although the President denied the claims as lies, the White House transcript reveals he did, in fact, say "the safety of the Rhine frontier does necessarily interest us," and that United States' "first line of defense" was the "continued independent existence" of over a dozen countries, including England, France, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Finland and Persia. Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists*, 304-07. Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt*, 181-82.

<sup>83</sup> Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists*, 302-04. Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt*, 172-75.

<sup>84</sup> Patrick J. Hearden, *Roosevelt Confronts Hitler: America's Entry into World War II* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1987), 137-38. For his part, Colcord was as unconcerned about the trade issue as he was military dangers. Not long after he sent out his article, Colcord aired this position on Latin America in a letter chain with Maine Senator Wallace White, who had claimed that while he saw no "immediate" dangers to the United States itself coming from Europe, he did see "a good deal more threat of trouble" in South America. Colcord countered that Germany and Italy posed no military threat to South America of any kind, and their growing "trade penetration" there was no more insidious than it had been in when he was "a boy in the 1890s" travelling up and down the coasts of that continent with his father. Wallace White to LC, January 24, 1939, CFA Box 64 Folder 1150. LC to Wallace White, January 28, 1939, CFA Box 64 Folder 1150.

opening years of the Second World War.<sup>85</sup> Yet even before that terrible but inevitable crisis arrived, Colcord was deeply skeptical about his country's place in the looming war.

I would give anything in the world to feel that it were possible for America to be wisely and bravely led in the times that are coming; led, I mean, by a leadership that is realistic, intellectually honest, and clearly informed. But I see no signs of it today. In order to accomplish a real neutrality if Europe does go to war, we would need to begin now to correct our present madness and clear up the ground of a sane public conviction. Lacking that, we will drift forward with our public emotionalism daily increasing, until when the war breaks out we will be one of the first to dash into the field.<sup>86</sup>

Colcord never quite left this dismal valley of pessimism, largely because he saw so little light in the situation to bolster his hope for “a real neutrality.” Through the years of war to come he, like so many other isolationists, struggled personally to help forestall that conclusion. But all the while, the ultimate futility of their efforts was no less obvious than the existential dangers they were trying to prevent. The winds of war were filling FDR's political sails, and in spite of the disaster that Colcord and his ilk warned of with such passion, the current of American opinion was already shifting away from isolation and towards the wider, chaotic world.

### **The Whirlpool, 1939-1941**

The debate over America's role in the Second World War began immediately on its outbreak. It raged on for over two years, and as Doenecke and Wilz note, for both sides the fundamental issues were understood as matters of national “life-or-death.”<sup>87</sup> In his monumental and definitive study of that titanic debate, Doenecke further shows that despite the “incredible

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<sup>85</sup> Historian Bear Braumoeller rightly stresses the distinct importance of threat perception as one of the core dividing lines between proponents of isolation and intervention. Bear Braumoeller, “The Myth of American Isolationism” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 6 (2010), 360. Justus Doenecke also notes that all through the opening years of World War II, anti-interventionists were fighting an uphill battle to reverse this trend in American public opinion. From September 1939 to April 1941, over 60 percent of Americans polled by Gallup consistently saw the logical conclusion of a German-dominated Europe as an attack on the United States. Justus D. Doenecke, *Storm on the Horizon: The Challenge to American Intervention, 1939-1941* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 37.

<sup>86</sup> LC to Arthur Vandenberg, June 4, 1939, CFA Box 60 Folder 1171.

<sup>87</sup> Doenecke and Wilz, *From Isolation to War*, 93.

diversity” of the anti-interventionist movement and the highly variable politics of its factions, the broad group shared some common positions besides their basic opposition to American involvement in the ongoing wars of Europe and Asia. They saw in war existential dangers to democracy at home, they denied that the Axis powers posed direct military threats to the United States, they favored a “negotiated peace” over absolute victory for either side, and they often questioned the moral superiority of the democracies over their fascist counterparts.<sup>88</sup>

Colcord’s initial response reflects these themes well. On October 6<sup>th</sup> in a long letter to Raymond Gram Swing – one of his closest journalistic colleagues from the Great War and now a news announcer for NBC – he unloaded his understanding of the war in Europe and his worst fears for the future. The extension of the war to the total defeat of either side promised no outcome but “the destruction of western Europe.” The time to stop the war was now, “while both sides have their bargaining power” and the ruin was still at a minimum. The mistakes of the past were as plain to him in 1939 as they had been in 1919. “Instead of bringing peace” as an unbiased mediating neutral, “America entered the [First World] war, financed it beyond sane economic limits, and helped the Allies to crush Germany. On the pages of history America was the devil of that piece, when the great Author really had cast her to be the angel.”

Such was Colcord’s perspective at its most optimistic. Otherwise, the circumstances of the war’s outbreak had not changed his basic *realpolitik* outlook in the slightest. Germany was only out for its own “self-interest,” just as with England and France. Looking at the conflict “from both sides,” he saw no moral advantage to either of them. And “as for [Germany’s] threat to the western hemisphere and the world, this is merely a bugaboo, of course, built up by

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<sup>88</sup> Doenecke, *Storm on the Horizon*, 324-27.

propaganda for political purposes.” But Colcord was not writing all this just for his own sake.

The purpose of his letter was to chide his friend for talking the opposite position, an especially grievous fault in light of their shared experience during the last war.

And it seems to me, Raymond, as I listened to you just now [on the radio], that you were in danger of allowing your emotions to warp your judgement, and that you had temporarily forgotten the lesson we learned and suffered in the World War. *By ‘we’ I mean you and I, not America.* You seemed to me to be allowing yourself to think of this war as another crusade of justice and truth; [and] allowing yourself to attribute right to one side and wrong to the other... As I see it, this war is merely a repetition of the World War, or rather, its second phase... We have had all this once before – a power war in the name of a moral crusade. Speaking for myself, I shall never be deluded again.<sup>89</sup>

Colcord felt obligated to make this special appeal to an old friend, but from the start of the war and until February 1941, he published nothing at all about the conflict or the United States’ wavering neutrality. Part of the reason Colcord showed so little interest in airing his opinions to the public was that he had no hopes of altering the views of non-isolationists; “It’s no more use to try to change the mind of one of these collectivists than it is to flap your arms and expect to fly.”<sup>90</sup> Another reason might have been the open and overwhelming preference the American public had for Britain and France against Germany. Rigidly “neutral” thinking (and in Colcord’s case, very deliberately denying ethical considerations all together) was a difficult feat amidst a war so easy to frame in both moral and national security terms.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> LC to Raymond Gram Swing, October 6, 1939, CFA Box 26 Folder 645. Emphasis added. Swing’s reply (which concluded with a plea to meet and talk things over when his friend got back to New York) explicitly evaded Colcord’s moral trap and focused on the threat imperative instead, perfectly illustrating one of the fundamental divides between the two sides of the intervention debate from its start to its finish. “Why see this war as a moral matter? We aren’t dealing with how the British Empire, or the United States, or any other part of the world came to be what it is. We are dealing with what kind of world there is to be. And if you think that Hitler can stand still, you just don’t understand what I understand.” Raymond Gram Swing to LC, October 11, 1939, CFA Box 26 Folder 645. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>90</sup> LC to Inez Colcord, October 12, 1939, CFA Box 5 Folder 67.

<sup>91</sup> Several major historians of American isolationism have noted these factors and their debilitating impact on the anti-interventionist movement of 1939-41. See Jonas, *Isolationism in America*, 170, Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists*, 364-65.

But even without publications, he was far from idle as a commentator on the flood of events through that year and a half. In his prolific correspondence, he dedicated himself lock, stock and barrel to channeling his views to a breadth of people. To a Danish friend who had stayed at Colcord's Searsport home the previous summer, Colcord wrote to dissuade him of a belief that Americans must be "more civilized" to avoid the regular conflicts that so mired Europe. "Our blessings depend almost wholly on geography, and your ills depend on much the same factor – geography plus history. Certainly the peace and security of the United States, or of the Western Hemisphere, don't come from higher wisdom or greater virtue."<sup>92</sup> He did not expect virtue out of Congress either. During the debate over FDR's proposed revision of the Neutrality Act to allow the sale of war materiel to belligerents if it was bought under the "cash-and-carry" formula, he encouraged leading isolationist Senator Arthur Vandenberg of Michigan to ratchet up the Republican resistance. "Things are too gentlemanly," an irate Colcord wrote, "the opposition doesn't really attack. The fight isn't personally and fiery enough. Instead of saying the administration's cash-and-carry plan will lead us into war, why not rip out and attack the President's foreign policy, showing that he has been committing acts of war for the past year or more, and accusing him of already placing us in the war?"<sup>93</sup>

Just once in 1940 did Colcord speak publicly in Maine about the war, FDR's foreign policy, and his strong preference for a policy strict non-intervention. He felt pressed to comment after the string of sweeping German victories through Denmark and Norway, the Low Countries, and finally France. "There is a lot of unnecessary hysteria in this country," Colcord said at the Bangor Kiwanis Club in late June, "and the President seems to be encouraging it." He spoke

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<sup>92</sup> Godfred Hartmann to LC, December 7, 1939, CFA Box 69 Folder 1188. LC to Godfred Hartmann, December 29, 1939, CFA Box 69 Folder 1188.

<sup>93</sup> LC to Arthur Vandenberg, October 6, 1939, CFA Box 16 Folder 462.

favorably of the perspective of Charles Lindbergh, the famous aviator and a leading civilian voice for non-intervention in the European war. “[T]he Atlantic is as broad as ever it has been,” and even if Germany were to defeat Britain and take total power in Europe, it would have neither the reason nor the means to attack the United States. “We should concern ourselves with keeping America a democracy,” he said in a thinly veiled jab at FDR, “not permitting it to drift into a totalitarian form of government.”<sup>94</sup>

But there was a reason Colcord was speaking before the public at all. The fear remained fixed in his mind that “in spite of the enormous lesson of the futility of our participation in the [First] World War, American opinion will again be swayed by influences extraneous to our own self-interest and the wisdom of history.”<sup>95</sup> Defense money was playing no small part in that shift. As historian Francis Rexford Cooley notes, even the rock-ribbed Republican state of Maine was enjoying the economic benefits of the spending spree by the summer of 1940 (a trend which continued and accelerated into 1941).<sup>96</sup> Colcord, too, was affected. Although his Bangor speech denied that America was threatened from abroad, he carefully assured his audience “I believe in it [“preparedness”] thoroughly.” His only critique was that current defense spending was packed with “waste” and geared towards offensive rather than defensive materiel, like tanks.<sup>97</sup>

FDR remained the clear leader of the charge towards American involvement in the war, and Colcord was continually furious through the late summer of 1940 that his Republican

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<sup>94</sup> “Slight Danger of Military Attack, Says Colcord,” *Bangor Daily News* (June 27, 1940). Colcord was more explicit in private. “Our chief and only totalitarian danger is at home, not abroad; it lies in the clear record of the New Deal for seven years, and in the possibility that now, under the stress of false fear, the country will lose its own basic democracy.” LC to Inez Colcord, May 15, 1940, Box 6 Folder 68.

<sup>95</sup> LC to Eugene Davidson, June 4, 1940, CFA Box 15 Folder 439.

<sup>96</sup> Francis Rexford Cooley, “From Isolationism to Interventionism in Maine, 1939-1941,” *Maine History* 37, No. 4 (Spring 1998), 221. The deluge of defense money was truly immense, totaling \$185 million between June 1940 and April 1941 alone. “Maine Defense Contracts Total \$185,155,355,” *Lewiston Journal* (April 10, 1941).

<sup>97</sup> “Slight Danger of Military Attack, Says Colcord,” *Bangor Daily News* (June 27, 1940).

opponent for president, Wendell Willkie, was doing so little to challenge him on “the dominant issue” of the coming election. “Willkie has got to do something to differentiate his policies fundamentally from those of Roosevelt... [for] if Roosevelt is re-elected in November the page will be closed on the America of ten generations of my forefathers, on the America I have loved faithfully and shall continue to believe in until my dying day.”<sup>98</sup> Colcord was not exaggerating. Chaffing badly after the orchestration of the Destroyers-for-Bases Deal in September, he made a direct appeal to candidate Willkie in the month before the election. “You cannot continue to say you are opposed to our entering the war but are in favor of all aid to Britain short of war, after Roosevelt has put us into the war on precisely that basis.”<sup>99</sup> Willkie did change his strategy in October as his electoral prospects began to dim, but it was far too late to affect the outcome. FDR won his unprecedented third term with a comfortable majority of the popular vote.<sup>100</sup>

The results were devastating for Colcord, and silenced him even more than he already was until the start of the following year.<sup>101</sup> Ironically, he was roused to new action only in part by the next “war measure” from FDR – another revision to the Neutrality Act to allow convoys of American merchant ships to travel into warzones. Rather, it was the unsatisfying response

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<sup>98</sup> LC to Amos Pinchot, September 7, 1940, CFA Box 72 Folder 1222.

<sup>99</sup> LC to Wendell Willkie, October 9, 1940, CFA Box 15 Folder 430. Colcord also made a remarkable prediction in this letter, one only mistaken in its timing. Suspecting that the recent British announcement that it would reopen its “Burma Road” to Nationalist China must to have been backed by an American guarantee, Colcord saw the move as implicit proof that the United States was “committed” to protecting Britain’s Empire in Asia. However, he only expected that Roosevelt was trying to “out-bluff” Japan into pulling back from its gains and did not anticipate real retaliation. “[I]f Japan, as I very much fear, refuses to be out-bluffed and takes naval and military action instead, we will be involved in a major conflict before the November election. This is where the present commitment leads, if the Administration’s judgement as to Japan is wrong.” Colcord’s instinct was correct. Roosevelt had, in fact, made a private agreement with London and the Chinese Nationalist government to divert 100 pursuit planes from Britain’s orders to China specifically for defending the Burma Road and deterring Japanese advances towards British colonial possessions in that region. Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt*, 270.

<sup>100</sup> Lynne Olson, *Those Angry Days: Roosevelt, Lindbergh, and America’s Fight Over World War II, 1939-1941* (New York: Random House, 2013), 257-63. Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt*, 248-50.

<sup>101</sup> He confessed the depth of his despair to his daughter a few days after the election. “We’ll be in the war now within three months, probably through the back door with Japan. We are repeating all the errors of the World War. This means the end of democracy in America. Well, the people have voted themselves out of it – there’s nothing much to be said.” LC to Inez Colcord, November 9, 1940, CFA Box 5 Folder 67.

from the most powerful anti-interventionist group in the country – the recently formed America First Committee (AFC) – that grabbed his attention anew. Colcord was already informally connected to the AFC by his friendship with one of its National Committee members, Amos Pinchot, and on January 2, 1941, his signature was requested for its official “Message to Congress” asking that they make “unmistakably clear by all your actions that the United States, in aiding the British, will never take the step [the Neutrality Act revision] that leads to war abroad.”<sup>102</sup>

Colcord responded with blunt criticism. “I cannot sign you Message to Congress because in my opinion it does not go far enough or state the case clearly or consistently. It tries to carry water on both shoulders, by taking sides yet wanting to avoid war.” The reality, he said, was that “there is no such thing” as a “measure short of war.” It was on the basis of just that “national delusion amounting to hypocrisy” that President Roosevelt had already placed America “definitely and actively at war with Germany.” Colcord only cautioned that the Committee alter its course and promote “the pure and basic principle of neutrality” as the only way to save America’s “national integrity” in the eyes of history.<sup>103</sup> “This grieves me very much,” Colcord wrote Pinchot, “because I realize that this is the crowd, above all others, that should be representing the true opposition to the way we are going.” But instead, by “placating popular opinion” which leaned so blindly toward “aid short of war,” the group was only abetting FDR’s long-term plan to sink America ever deeper into the European war.<sup>104</sup>

Colcord recovered from his indignation at the AFC quickly, though, for that same month, Roosevelt’s newest and most radical “aid short of war” proposal yet was put before Congress –

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<sup>102</sup> Robert E. Wood to LC, January 2, 1941, with enclosure, “Message to Congress,” CFA Box 7 Folder 81.

<sup>103</sup> LC to Robert E. Wood, January 6, 1941, CFA Box 7 Folder 81.

<sup>104</sup> LC to Amos Pinchot, January 6, 1941, CFA Box 7 Folder 81.



H.R. 1776, the “Lend-Lease” bill. The bill proposed to empower the president to transfer federal property (including arms and military equipment of all kinds) to any nation whose security he deemed “vital” to the defense of the United States. The move was received with extreme shock by anti-interventionists across the board. The cries of “dictatorship” showed echoes of the Court packing fight of 1937, as did the AFC-organized flood of letters to Congressional offices denouncing the plan.<sup>105</sup> Replying late to Colcord’s letter, the AFC National Director wrote personally to assure him that the group was concentrating all its efforts on the bill’s “outright and complete defeat” in hopes of showing “a strong and unmistakable expression of disapproval for the administration’s whole foreign policy.”<sup>106</sup> This was just what Colcord had been hoping for, but even before hearing from the AFC about its resolute stand, he was making moves of his own. Beginning in mid-January he wrote his support to his main isolationist contacts in the Senate – Hiram Johnson, Arthur Vandenberg, Henrik Shipstead, and Robert Lafollette, Jr. – and to Maine’s entire Congressional delegation – Senators Ralph Owen Brewster and Wallace White, and Representatives Frank Fellows, James Oliver, and Margaret Chase Smith.<sup>107</sup>

More useful than those letters for understanding Colcord’s isolationism at this late point is his last foreign policy op-ed of the *New York Herald-Tribune* of February 22. The letter was

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<sup>105</sup> Doenecke, *Storm on the Horizon*, 167-68. Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists*, 414-15.

<sup>106</sup> R. Douglas Stuart, Jr. to LC, February 8, 1941, CFA Box 7 Folder 81. For his part, Colcord was absolutely enraged by a nasty comment FDR made in his January 6th speech announcing the plan; that the way to deal with “slackers and troublemakers in our own midst” was “first, to shame them by patriotic example, and, if that fails to use the sovereignty of government to save government.” Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists*, 413. Colcord translated the passage for one of his close friends in New York: “In other words, shut their God damned mouths. Good straight Hitlerism.” LC to Fred Foote, January 8, 1941, CFA Box 7 Folder 81.

<sup>107</sup> All these letters and their replies are scattered across the Colcord Family Archive except for those between Colcord and Robert Lafollette, Jr., which are privately held by Professor Parker Albee of Falmouth, Maine. The replies were positive from the four nationally-prominent isolationist Senators, all of whom voted against the bill as expected. Most of the Maine replies were more ambivalent, and White, Brewster, Fellows, and Smith all ultimately voted for the bill in its final amended form in March. Only James Oliver of the First District – surprisingly, home to the major shipyards at Bath and Portland which were reaping a much-needed windfall from federal defense spending – voted against Lend-Lease. Oliver made his intention perfectly clear in his January reply to Colcord, decrying the bill as a step towards both war abroad and dictatorship at home. See James Oliver to LC, January 16, 1941, CFA Box 13 Folder 336.

ostensibly a blast against the Lend-Lease bill. Its only functions were to “legalize by act of Congress a war condition which the President has already incurred,” to “have America finance the war in Europe beyond its natural economic limits” (as it had in the Great War), and to continue the eight-year process of consolidating more power in FDR’s hands. But more than this, Colcord’s letter also chided the American people for following a dishonest leader. The “hue and cry of the threat of totalitarianism” abroad was distracting them from the obvious erection of totalitarianism at home. And while the hysteria let loose among the people had not yet broken their “national will” to keep the country out of war, it had blinded them to their own recent past. In “the World War of 1914-18,” America had slid into a conflict that was not its own, achieved none of its high-minded aims, and in fact, had ensured that “the war closed with an almost complete lack of justice, reason and economic sense, so that another world war was inevitable... What is history for, if we derive no lessons from it?”<sup>108</sup>

No matter the course of events overseas, Colcord would not change his old positions. But America, on the other hand, was changing fast. The final Lend-Lease bill passed both Houses of Congress in March, and despite staunch resistance from the AFC and other anti-interventionists, support for the bill resoundingly outweighed the opposition. The exact opposite of what the AFC’s National Director had written to Colcord thus came to pass, and in more than just a sense, this was a referendum on American isolationism itself. Wayne Cole notes that by the start of 1941, isolationists in and out of Congress were “fighting a losing battle.” Though “millions of Americans continued to believe that [they] were right,” the glaring challenge posed by the Axis and Roosevelt’s shrewd leadership combined to “shatter” their image in the public mind. FDR

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<sup>108</sup> Lincoln Colcord, “America Already in War,” *New York-Herald Tribune* (February 23, 1941). Curiously, this op-ed was reprinted in an isolationist-leaning northern Indiana newspaper. Lincoln Colcord, “Long Step Toward Dictatorship,” *South Bend Tribune* (February 26, 1941).

and his interventionist allies were working hard to discredit the isolationist worldview and those who supported it. Over the course of the year following his reelection, isolationists became “widely viewed as narrow, self-serving, partisan, conservative, antidemocratic, anti-Semitic, pro-Nazi, fifth columnist, and even treasonous.”<sup>109</sup>

Cole was careful to call these accusations “guilt-by-association” tactics used by the president to discredit his harshest critics.<sup>110</sup> But the association was real nevertheless. Indeed, so pressing was the dilemma of open fascists within the AFC’s ranks that it nearly caused a split between its National Committee and its largest single chapter, the New York City branch under John Flynn.<sup>111</sup> But in Colcord’s case, the worst of the labels Cole cites are clearly invalid. It is true that Colcord’s “realism” could be extraordinarily brutal.<sup>112</sup> But in spite of his dogmatic belief in the uniformity of national intentions, he did not have any special sympathy for Nazi Germany, a fact which he made clear in 1939 and would again later in 1941. Nor was Colcord anti-democratic. On the contrary, his most frequently vented fear was that if America went to war abroad it would inevitably cripple democracy at home. And Colcord could never be called a traitor to his country. Its interests and welfare were his highest concern in the world, and isolationism was what he saw as the best policy for defending them. But narrowness and partisanship were undeniably vices he indulged in. His instinct to opposition was almost reflexive by 1941; just as he had read everything good into Woodrow Wilson in 1917, now he read everything evil into FDR. And while even some isolationist senators could see at least a

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<sup>109</sup> Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists*, 410-11.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 322

<sup>111</sup> Moser, *Right Turn*, 125-30.

<sup>112</sup> “I have never been a pacifist, Amos; I recognize that the world’s affairs have always been dominated by force, and I reckon they always will be... History is nothing but a record of man’s absurd barbarisms and brutalities in search of gain. Our own record isn’t particularly different from any other.” LC to Amos Pinchot, March 14, 1941, CFA Box 72 Folder 1222.

glimmer of national interest in making a concerted effort to support Britain against Nazi Germany, Colcord's insistence that any step which brought the country closer to war was a step towards unmitigated disaster certainly limited his strategic vision.

After the Lend-Lease bill's passage, Colcord understood the grimness of the situation all too clearly. Yet his current perspective was still in line with his incorrigible pessimism of the last two years. "There is no substance left to the opposition in the public mind," he wrote to Amos Pinchot, and "[a]s for keeping out of the war, I don't believe it can be done; in fact, we are in the war already... now that the die is cast, I believe it would be better for us to go into it all over, in honest fashion... I can't bear this insincere and hypocritical position in which we now find ourselves... it almost seems like a hideous joke to me; and in this state of mind I can honestly sit back and watch the show as if I were reading history."<sup>113</sup>

In the fall of 1941, it was Colcord's tragic reward for his isolationist advocacy to date to have the privilege of entering his thoughts on that "hideous joke" into the eternal record of the great intervention debate. On October 18<sup>th</sup>, he received an invitation from Senators Johnson, Lafollette, and Robert Taft to testify before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee against the latest "war measure" from the White House – a revision to the Neutrality Act that would allow the arming of American merchant ships now crossing the Atlantic with aid for Britain on a near-daily basis.<sup>114</sup> Colcord could never have passed up such an opportunity. He accepted the offer and rushed south to Washington, where he was graciously hosted by SFRC-member Wallace White of Maine despite their earlier difference of opinion about Lend-Lease. On October 24<sup>th</sup>,

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<sup>113</sup> LC to Amos Pinchot, March 14, 1941, CFA Box 72 Folder 1222.

<sup>114</sup> Telegram from Hiram Johnson, Robert M. Lafollette, and Robert Taft to LC, October 18, 1941, CFA Box 60 Folder 1107. The senators' telegram was preceded by one from Edwin Borchard the day before, who seems to have played a role in paving the way for invitation. Telegram from Edwin Borchard to LC, October 17, 1941, in *ibid*.

Colcord settled into his chair before a panel of over twenty U.S. Senators and said his piece alongside a host of other isolationist intellectuals, including Charles Beard, John T. Flynn, George Peek, and his old friend and colleague from *The Nation*, Oswald Garrison Villard.

In his opening statement, Colcord stood on his oldest ground. “I have never felt neutrality to be a fit subject for legislation,” he said, or that it could be “controlled by legislative acts. The only way to be neutral is simply to be neutral; that is, to feel that way.” Nevertheless, he also did the job he was called to the Capitol for. The arming of merchant ships was no different from all the other foreign policy steps FDR had pushed through thus far. “It is purely and simply a question of whether or not we shall commit another act of undeclared war in the European conflict. To consider it in any other light is intellectual dishonesty.” By this point, though, Colcord was almost less disturbed by actual American involvement in war than the “dishonest” pseudo-neutrality that was leading to the same end. “I think it is a terrible thing for the country to be carried forward in this way from act to act, in a state of delusion as to what these acts really embody.” Britain, at least, “had the honor to declare war against Germany” legally. America, by contrast, was an “ostensible neutral” while in reality being anything but. Thus, as it had been since 1939, the real question of “peace or war” with Germany was still being evaded.<sup>115</sup>

Such was Colcord’s prepared statement, but then came the period of open questioning. The lion’s share of this time was occupied by questions from Democratic Senator Theodore Green of Rhode Island. The senator’s grilling concentrated on breaking down Colcord’s ideas of neutrality in theory versus in practice. If he did not support the Neutrality Act from the start, Green inquired, then why should he oppose its revision at all? Colcord replied that his argument

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<sup>115</sup> “Hearings for Friday, October 24, 1941 – Statement of Lincoln Colcord” *Modification of Neutrality Act of 1939* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1941), 217-21.

was based on a “chain of logic, that if we do this thing [arm ships] it will inevitably bring about war” by forcing the other side – Germany – to go into “unlimited submarine warfare” just as it had in the Great War. Senator Green also asked just how “neutral” Colcord really was, whether he had “no preference as to which side should win this war – England or Germany?” Colcord was honest in his answer. He did consider himself neutral, but this did not mean he was without personal feelings about the two sides. As “an American citizen,” he said, “I believe that our country should have remained legally neutral. As a human being all of my sympathies are with Great Britain.” But nevertheless, his core reasoning for American neutrality remained unaffected by any such sympathies as an individual. Neither the Germany of the moment nor a future Germany that had defeated Britain (which he saw as unlikely) posed a threat to the United States. War for America was still as much a matter of choice as neutrality.<sup>116</sup>

Only on one point was Colcord forced to make a real concession. Towards the end of the questioning, he made a single statement that Committee Chairman Tom Connally of Texas could not let stand. Justifying his conviction that America ought to live with the status quo Europe sets for itself, he said that “[t]he national life is not endangered in my opinion by anything that happens in the world outside the United States.” Senator Connally pounced. “Would you favor submitting to the conquest of Canada by some European power,” he asked? Caught in a blind, Colcord had no choice but to retreat. “Well, we would do something about that; yes.”<sup>117</sup>

Other than this embarrassing snag, Colcord left Washington with his head held high, and the inevitable (although slimmer than with Lend-Lease) passage of the ship arming bill early the next month did not dampen his personal pride in that final commentary on American neutrality

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 222-27.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 229.

and the Second World War. Nor was he disappointed that by the time he returned from the Capitol on October 28<sup>th</sup>, he had another invitation – now eight days old – from the New York chapter of the America First Committee asking if he could be a guest on the platform of their next mass meeting at Madison Square Garden on the 30<sup>th</sup>. Naturally, Colcord was unable to make another long trip on such short notice, but having warmed to the group considerably since January, he gave them full permission to use his name on behalf of their shared cause.<sup>118</sup>

With American involvement in either of the wars in Europe and Asia lurching closer by the day, Colcord made his last stand on his isolationist principles closer to home. In a step reflecting the hollowness of his Democratic label, he attended the annual meeting of Maine's Young Republicans on November 15<sup>th</sup> in the state capital. There he participated in a "Round Table Discussion on Foreign Policy" with a professor of history from Colby College and a retired army captain from Waldoboro. The discussion, however, was reported by one paper as closer to a "debate" in which some of the points "were like the flashing of sharp swords."<sup>119</sup> Surprisingly, though, very little of that discussion was recorded by the Maine papers. Colcord took what was described as "the isolationist stand" by saying that Germany did not pose the threat that his opponents claimed and that "'we should have been neutral from the start.'"<sup>120</sup>

But Colcord was standing against forces beyond just two "interventionists." The entire course of the meeting was an unambiguous display of support for the president's defense program and his foreign policy against Germany. The "young Republicans" themselves debated and voted overwhelmingly against "the policy of isolationism" as "not in accord with the best interests of the United States." Rather, they favored a foreign policy of "united and alert

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<sup>118</sup> Paul Palmer to LC, October 20, 1941, CFA Box 7 Folder 81. LC to Paul Palmer, October 28, 1941, in *ibid*.

<sup>119</sup> "Maine Young Republicans Oppose Policy of Isolation," *Bangor Daily News* (November 17, 1941).

<sup>120</sup> "Young GOP Bans Isolation," *Kennebec Journal* (November 17, 1941)

nationalism taking its place in world affairs” with a central goal to “destroy and defeat totalitarianism.” This, of course, was President Roosevelt’s foreign policy, and the adults of the meeting – including Governor Sumner Sewall and Congresswoman Smith – followed the youths in throwing their support behind national defense and aid to Britain. Senator Wallace White was particularly strident. “This is not a European war to establish another balance of power... It’s more than that because of Hitler’s purpose to enforce his policies upon the world... And yet there are some who say this war is no concern of the United States!”<sup>121</sup>

Colcord had good reason to suspect that White’s words were aimed at one isolationist in the audience specifically. Besides the fact that the Senator was attacking his talking points, by Colcord’s account, “about half the time he swung around and talked straight at me – we glared at each other through about half the speech. People were amused at it.”<sup>122</sup> He had additional indications that even Maine, his home state whose resistance to the lure of the New Deal he took so much pride in during the 1930s, was trending fast into the President’s camp on the issues of foreign war and national “defense.”<sup>123</sup> Just days before the Young Republicans meeting, the one America First chapter in Maine – founded in September in Portland – was outright denied access to Bangor’s City Hall for a mass meeting. In an open letter of protest, the local AFC chairman decried the action as “partisan censorship,” since the pro-intervention Committee to Defend America by Aiding the Allies had used the facility just recently.<sup>124</sup> Justus Doenecke notes that

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<sup>121</sup> “Maine Young Republicans Oppose Policy of Isolation,” *Bangor Daily News* (November 17, 1941).

<sup>122</sup> LC to Inez Colcord, November 17, 1941, CFA Box 6 Folder 69.

<sup>123</sup> Colcord wrote of the Republican crowd, “No one is doing any thinking; they’re just anxious to get on the bandwagon... No one tried to answer my arguments, and no one cared. It was all kind of funny, but very disheartening. The guts have gone out of Maine, all right. We literally are a tourist state now, and our politics are about on the level of a good butler.” LC to Clifford Carver, December 1, 1941, CFA Box 8 Folder 108.

<sup>124</sup> “Haven Sawyer Protests Action of City Council,” *Bangor Daily News* (November 14, 1941). The City Hall was eventually opened to an AFC meeting with isolationist Senator Gerald Nye as the guest speaker. The timing, however, was five days before Pearl Harbor. “Sen. Nye Addresses Gathering in Bangor City Hall Tuesday Night,” *Bangor Daily News* (December 3, 1941).



such informal censorship was rapidly becoming the norm for anti-interventionists by mid-1941. In cities across the country, America First meetings were refused access to local venues and the organization itself was subject to extreme rhetorical “abuse” through much of the American press. Indeed, the rhetoric of President Roosevelt himself played a key role in encouraging that hostility towards both the AFC specifically and its isolationist principles generally.<sup>125</sup>

In the end, Colcord’s pessimism was justified. As a consequence, he could take the event which finally brought America officially into a foreign war in stride. In the days leading up to Pearl Harbor, he was already seeing the disaster clearly on the horizon. “[I]t’s plain that the Administration is almost in the position of forcing war on Japan. There is a belief in Washington that Japan is bluffing, and that war with her would merely be a push-over. I think that they are not considering the realities.”<sup>126</sup> Indeed, they were not, and when the inevitable happened, he kept up his pessimism at full tilt. “Japan has called our bluff, not we theirs,” Colcord wrote not long after Pearl Harbor. “I think we are going to lose the Philippines, and I think Britain is going to lose Singapore. The West is in the process of being thrown out of the Orient. It’s an historic occasion. And an entirely justifiable one, when you look back on the history of how the West got there in the first place.” America, of course, was still at no risk of being “conquered” by either Japan or Germany, but a conquest of another kind had already taken place to bring the country to where it was. “Well,” he brooded, “the League of Nations boys have at last got their way. We’re out for collective security, picking the bad nations, America mothering the earth, and all the rest... We can say good-bye, Elling, to the world we have known.”<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> *In Danger Undaunted: The Anti-Interventionist Movement of 1940-41 as Revealed in the Papers of the America First Committee*, edited by Justus D. Doenecke, (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1990), 35-36. Doenecke, *Storm on the Horizon*, 272-75.

<sup>126</sup> LC to Clifford Carver, December 1, 1941, CFA Box 8 Folder 108.

<sup>127</sup> LC to Elling Aannestad, December 21, 1941, CFA Box 7 Folder 83.

But as that awesome wave of reality surged over him and as America continued to change beneath his feet, Lincoln Colcord stayed just the same as he ever was. Don't forget, he told his daughter in February 1942, that "our war is a foreign war, and what we are defending are other peoples' countries... Makes me furious to have all the isolationists quitting on the job, and everyone saying that events have proved them so wrong. Just the opposite is the case; as far as I'm concerned events have proved me right in every particular." Lest anyone else write the political epitaph for this man or his worldview, here is Colcord's own: "I am one isolationist who doesn't take back a damned word he said."<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> LC to Inez Colcord, February 3, 1942, CFA Box 6 Folder 70.

## CHAPTER THREE

### ARTHUR LOWER: APOSTACY

#### Introduction

In his survey of twentieth century English Canadian history writing, Carl Berger boldly labeled Arthur Lower “the most nationalistic of English Canadian historians,” a man constantly preoccupied with national identity, one whose writing was dominated by a quixotic “search for a nationalist creed” to distinguish a unique and meaningful Canadian nationhood.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, at the molten core of Lower’s vision of his country, Canada was a perennial nation in the making; at once an entity with an undeniably solid historical existence, yet also an ephemeral and grandiose idea forever struggling to be born (with nationalists like Lower as its loyal midwives). Arthur Lower lived his life with the story of his nation firmly in mind, a saga which he also had the tremendous privilege of writing for public consumption. He evolved with Canada, sharing with it his own youth and maturity, and projecting those phases of human development onto that greater version of himself.<sup>2</sup> It was his all too bitter misfortune that so much of the reality of Canadian life in the 1930s refused to align with his personal ideals.

Coming to the ideology in early 1933 and leaving it with equal abruptness in September 1939, Lower placed the principles and policies of isolationism at the center of his national vision for Canada during that decade. As an outgrowth of his preexisting nationalism, Lower’s stripe of

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History: Aspects of English-Canadian Historical Writing, 1900-1970* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1976), 112. In a belated reply written at the twilight of his life, Lower accepted Berger’s label proudly, declaring that “all Canadian historians who have made any mark on their generation have been nationalists.” Arthur R.M. Lower, “Nationalism and the Canadian Historian,” *Canadian Historical Review* 66 (December 1985), 545.

<sup>2</sup> Berger noted as much in his review of Lower’s memoir, *My First Seventy-Five Years*. “The most striking feature of his memoirs is that they show, often indirectly, even inadvertently, the integral relationships between his own experience and the Canadian past. In a very real sense *Colony to Nation* [his famous general history of Canada] was his autobiography.” C.C. Berger, *International Journal* 23, no. 3 (1968), 492.

isolationism was primarily dedicated to isolating Canada from Britain – politically, militarily, and culturally. This was also the pattern of his likeminded compatriots. In his monumental series *Canada and the Age of Conflict*, C.P. Stacey describes “a new generation of acerbic nationalist” English Canadians, “based chiefly in the universities,” as the drivers of interwar Canadian isolationist thought. Political scientist F.R. Scott and historian Frank Underhill are mentioned here by name, as is the magazine *Canadian Forum*, “an ably conducted Toronto-monthly of leftist views and small circulation.”<sup>3</sup> Lower fits into this left-leaning university demographic perfectly. He was a professor of history at a small but notable Canadian college, a self-described liberal (though not a socialist like Underhill and Scott), and an outspoken advocate for civil liberties through the course of his mature life. He also published several of his isolationist articles in *Canadian Forum* during the late-1930s and was a subscriber to the magazine from as early as 1931. But most of his isolationist pieces appeared in a broad variety of outlets ranging from popular magazines like *Maclean's* to elite institutional journals like *Queen's Quarterly*.<sup>4</sup>

Lower asserted his belief in nationalist isolationism with conviction and indignation. Through the 1930s – the decade he would describe in hindsight as the “crown” of his historical career – his burning hostility against Britain’s still powerful influence over Canadian foreign policy, against the glaring mistakes of British leadership, and against the inability of English

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<sup>3</sup> C.P. Stacey, *Canada and the Age of Conflict: A History of Canadian External Policies*, Vol. 2, 1921-1948, *The Mackenzie King Era* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 232. One of Lower’s own postscripts to the great Canadian foreign policy debate of the 1930s mirrors Stacey’s assessment from four decades later. The “nationalist school,” a movement “of the left,” took the lead in promoting “the thesis that Canada’s own vital interests must be the determining factor in her foreign policy” rather than antiquated “colonial” sentiment. A.R.M. Lower, “The Foreign Policy of Canada,” *New Commonwealth Quarterly* 7 (April 1942), 277.

<sup>4</sup> Heick and Graham’s bibliography for Lower counts 62 total publications – books, articles, transcribed speeches, and some poetry – between 1930 and 1939. Of those, no less than 20 were explicitly dedicated to foreign affairs, with additional overlap into pieces on other subjects. That bibliography, however, excludes most of Lower’s sporadic but highly revealing “letters to the editor” in the *Winnipeg Free Press* and other publications. *His Own Man: Essays in Honour of Arthur Reginald Marsden Lower*, edited by W.H. Heick and Roger Graham, (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1974), 165-69.

Canadians to detach themselves emotionally from their traditional mother country, all carried over into his published writing and public speaking. Isolationism as a national policy and as a mentality for Canadians to understand the world was an elemental part of his nationalist cure for all those deep-seated and distinctly British ills.

Ironically, Lower's resentment of Britain and its overbearing place in Canadian life was never expressed more clearly than in October of 1940, a full year after his leap away from isolationism and over to support for a war-beleaguered Britain. Writing to a close confidant, a fellow isolationist of the 1930s, Lower revealed the ultimate basis of this dramatic pivot:

I have no objection to working alliances with other powers in our own national interests (and I accept this war as now, thanks to the unparalleled mess that has been made in Europe, in our national interests – that is, it is Hitler's hide or ours) but the religion of 'Britishism' must go. As long as that false and dark idol worship obtains among us, we Canadians can never be independent, for we are slaves to ourselves.<sup>5</sup>

The cardinal elements of Lower's nationalist *and* isolationist worldviews are on naked display in this simple paragraph. Independence was his goal for Canada, and the ability of the country to act on its own terms and in its own interests was the practical measure of true sovereignty. But important, too, was independence of the mind. Despite all their political gains, Canadians still could not be a people without a self-consciously Canadian identity, the psychic key to culturally distinguishing their own nation from its colonial parent state. Even as he finally validated Canada's alignment with Britain in its existential struggle against Nazi Germany, the "religion of Britishism" was still the faith which Lower had decisively broken with, and that which he had painstakingly replaced with another, essentially Canadian one.

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<sup>5</sup> Arthur Lower (hereafter **AL**) to T.S. Ewart, October 8, 1940, Arthur Lower Fonds (hereafter **AFL**) Box 1 File 15.

### **The Undercurrent, 1889-1929**

Like all people, Arthur Lower's adult life was profoundly shaped by the circumstances of his youth. A child of the late-Victorian era, he was born in the small but prosperous central Ontario town of Barrie to first-generation immigrants from England. His father, a merchant, was successful enough in business to support seven children in a large house near the shore of the local lake. His mother was a convert to Methodism who took the rest of her family with her from Anglicanism into the fervent but popular sect. Shy as a boy and mildly alienated from his peers by his intellectual bent, Lower set out early on the path towards professional history as a livelihood and source of identity. Supporting himself financially with work as a forest fire ranger during the summers, he was the first in his family to receive a college education, attending the University of Toronto for his undergraduate degree from 1909 to 1914. He subsequently worked as a primary school teacher in Toronto until 1916, when he left Canada for the British Navy and service in the First World War. The long span of Lower's early years was not only decisive in his path towards the writing and teaching of Canadian history. Personal events of this period also played a determining role in his ideological evolution as a Canadian nationalist.

The many details of Lower's first three decades, so candidly revealed in his 1967 memoir, have been the fodder for Canadian scholars dissecting the private influences in Lower's work as an historian. Carl Berger speculates that dysfunction within Lower's family had a marked influence on his later writing. Some of Lower's most important historical motifs – characterizing the nation as a “familial community,” his stress on the importance of unity through social homogeneity – were logical extensions of their author's imbalanced domestic life.<sup>6</sup> C.P. Champion, too, notes the influence of personal struggle in shaping the historian's

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<sup>6</sup> Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History*, 112.

worldview, linking Lower's youthful rejection of Methodism with his mature dedication to inspiring a nationalist "faith" for Canada, a possible "quasi-spiritual substitute for religion."<sup>7</sup>

These frank assessments reveal important and long-held elements of Lower's worldview. But to understand his nationalism in full, and to trace the deepest roots of his later but interconnected isolationism, his early feelings for Britain and its place in Canadian society must be illustrated. The memoir remains essential for this task. Writing in his old age and at the height of his fame, Lower showed remarkably little compunction at airing some of the most intimate details of his life for the Canadian reading public. But nowhere was the author's self-assessment sharper or more sullen than in describing his relationship with his father, Fred Lower, whom he bluntly labeled "a negative influence in my formative years, contributing little in the way of guidance though spending himself in unending toil to keep his family going."<sup>8</sup> Indeed, so cold was the father toward the son that nothing short of the latter's return from the war in Europe in 1919 was enough to break the ice.<sup>9</sup> So intense was young Lower's resentment in kind, that even though it was his mother who first brought the family into the Methodist camp he nevertheless channeled his bitterness about their "desertion" of the traditional church toward his father, who "[f]or some years" afterward became "a stranger and almost an alien to me" as a result.<sup>10</sup>

Beyond all this, the sharpest wedge separating Fred and Arthur Lower was not another personality flaw, nor the father's strong Conservative affiliation, but a cultural trait endemic to

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<sup>7</sup> C.P. Champion, *The Strange Demise of British Canada: The Liberals and Canadian Nationalism, 1964-68* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010) 97.

<sup>8</sup> Arthur R.M. Lower, *My First Seventy-Five Years* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1967), 4.

<sup>9</sup> Lower recalled walking home with his father through Barrie, still clad in his naval officer's uniform, as "the one and only time in my life that I caught him exhibiting paternal pride." Ibid., 119.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 9.

Canadians of British descent at the turn of the twentieth century. Fred Lower was a Canadian in name only. In reality, he was “an English exile to the day of his death.” Lower continued:

[A]s he got older his thoughts and words turned more and more towards ‘home.’ So constant were the allusions, so disparaging the comparisons, so peculiar the friends that this nostalgia entailed, that it became distinctly unpopular with other members of the family and shoved us farther into the direction of nativism than many a Canadian without this close English association has felt any need to go.<sup>11</sup>

Fred Lower was not an unusual case. Barrie itself was “almost as much a transcript of a little town in the British Isles as it was a Canadian community.” The social environment of Arthur Lower’s youth was one in which there was absolutely “no dissent” from the reigning dogma of “Britishism.” A mentality stretching far beyond the confines of little Barrie, Britishism was laden with multiple meanings for English Canadians of Lower’s generation and prior. It meant that the country nearest and dearest to their hearts was to be found not at home, in Canada, but abroad in the “shining figure of Britannia” across the sea. Internally, the meaning of Britishism was equally simple, “Canada was British, and that was that... the general concept of Britishness overrode everything else.” Although young Lower, despite his background, felt brewing within himself “a certain hostility to all things English,” this was far from apparent in his actions through the first three decades of his life.<sup>12</sup>

Even as the foundation of his later nationalism was laid, Arthur Lower hewed close to his British roots in the years surrounding the First World War. This was not merely a consequence of social pressure in Barrie. The college atmosphere at the University of Toronto was one of independence and rebellion, where students would “invariably find themselves in revolution against their past.” Lower was not immune from this trend. While at university he “destroyed

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 17, 20-22.



nearly the entire religious structure handed down to me,” leaving the gulf between himself and his family “vastly widened.” Yet he was not prepared to become an iconoclast in the religious sense; “heritage and tradition were far too strong for me to be tempted to set myself up in opposition to orthodoxy. I might be free of dogma, but I was bound nevertheless.”<sup>13</sup>

In that same vein, he was also unprepared to be an iconoclast in a secular, social capacity. After 1914 as before, Lower remained a public adherent to the cultural orthodoxy of Britishism. This was well in line with the rest of his ethnic cohort. Although Canada, as a British Dominion with no right to an independent foreign policy of its own, joined the First World War immediately when Britain did, this was not at all to the chagrin of Canada’s British-descended (and for a large part, British-born) population. On the contrary, they replied to the call to arms with an explosion of patriotic feeling and a flood of volunteers, though the numbers were not so great as to avoid the institution of Conscription in 1917.<sup>14</sup>

While he did not join the war as swiftly as Canada itself did, Lower’s own pro-British sentiment was as sincere an expression of racial and patriotic feeling as those of other Canadians of his kind. Emblematic of this was Lower’s first serious published article, a May 1915 piece for a Toronto University student publication. Written while he was unable to enlist for service because of a dispute with his older brother on who would go abroad and who would stay behind, “Nationalism and Peace” was Lower’s personal “justification for my own [later] participation [in the war].” It was also a significant intellectual milestone for its author. Here was Lower’s first

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 57-59.

<sup>14</sup> Mark David Sheftall, *Altered Memories of the Great War: Divergent Narratives of Britain, Australia, New Zealand and Canada* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 92-95. At least one Canadian historian has taken a more skeptical view of the image of English Canadian “mass enthusiasm.” See Bryan Douglas Tennyson, *Canada's Great War, 1914-1918: How Canada Helped Save the British Empire and Became a North American Nation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 9-10.

public enunciation of nationalist ideas. Within its four brief pages lay part of the foundational vocabulary for his writing on Canadian nationalism from the 1920s onwards: *nation*, ““a race which possesses its own government, language, customs and culture and enough self-consciousness to preserve them,”” and *nationality*, “a race which possesses all of these except its own government... its constant aim will always be to become a nation.”<sup>15</sup>

Yet here, too, was an explicit moral endorsement of the British Empire and Canada’s place within it. Lower’s article condemned Germany for holding Poles, Danes, and French “in subjugation,” and Austria-Hungary, where “the tyranny of race over race is not so galling even in the Turkish Empire.” As a contrast, he presented the British system as the antithesis of that tyranny, as a model for the successful application of “the national principle,” and as a healthy “confederation” of “small states” coexisting in a “happy condition” that war-torn Europe ought to emulate. The British Empire, Lower wrote, “has shown how well sister nations may live in union to the advantage of all; England and Scotland, Cape Colony and Transvaal, Ontario and Quebec, are shining examples of different nations living their own free life together on equal terms, and developing in their own way without let or hindrance.”<sup>16</sup>

Readers versed in Lower’s articles of the 1930s might suspect this passage was written tongue-in-cheek. All six of those “sister nations” are equally useful as examples of the bitterest national conflict, and Britain’s global empire was flush with nationalities held “in subjugation.” Later in life Lower made statements similar in content but with an unambiguously sarcastic tone.

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<sup>15</sup> A.R.M. Lower, “Nationalism and Peace,” *The School* 3, No. 9 (May 1915), 613. Lower’s quoted definition of nation and unquoted definition of nationality were drawn from a curious (but uncited) source. Both were adapted from the purported reply of a Serbian representative in the Austrian Empire to a question – “what is a nation?” – from Lajos Kossuth, the Hungarian revolutionary of 1848. The original quote can be found in R.W. Seton-Watson, *The Southern Slav Question* (London: Constable, 1911), 46. In his memoir, Lower names only official British and Allied publications as his sources for the essay. The other readings which contributed to the piece went undisclosed. Lower, *My First Seventy-Five Years*, 90.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 614-16.

In his memoir, however, he asserts the sincerity of his sympathy for Britain at the time, and of his rationale as an “innocent young man” for joining the war a year after writing the article:

As I look back on my own enlistment, it seems to me that to explain it fully I would have to explain a whole way of life, that of the English-Canadian people and that of my family and of myself. One point sticks out; I was just in the current and had no doubts about the rightness – and righteousness – of the war. It never occurred to me that there might be something to be said as [a] counter-account.<sup>17</sup>

As an “innocent young man” lacking that all important “counter-account,” and mired as he was in an all-pervasive British sentiment which even the rebelliousness of youth could not dull, Lower followed “the current” to its logical conclusion. In the spring of 1916, he duly enlisted in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve at the age of twenty-six. Although by the end of the war he had attained the rank of lieutenant and participated in one major military action off the Belgian coast, Lower summarized his service on submarine depot ships as mundane. On the water, his time was defined by the tedium of naval routine; and on shore, by his disappointing home port, “Dismal Dover.”<sup>18</sup>

The most valuable element of Lower’s war experience was not the thrill of conflict or even pride of service, but his interaction with England and its people.<sup>19</sup> While the living history of the country was an endless source of fascination, Lower, as with other “Canadian boys,” knew that he was “[a] stranger in England” despite his British uniform. Between himself and his national hosts stood the same cultural “gulf that separates English and Canadians” as peoples. A

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>19</sup> The most important English connection of all was Lower’s future wife, Evelyn Smith, of the coastal town Folkstone (just south of Dover along the Channel coast). The two met in the spring of 1917 when Lower was already engaged to a Toronto woman. Lower and Smith became engaged in May of 1919 while he was still in England and they married in October of 1920 after a year together in Canada. These details can be found in a note written by Arthur Lower not long after Evelyn’s death. “Kingston, July 3, 1976,” ALF Box 10, File 3.

wall of social “ice,” variable in thickness, continually isolated the young Canadian from the English men and women who surrounded him through the course of his time abroad.<sup>20</sup>

Lower was not totally alone in feeling this way. In an insightful comparative article, R. Douglas Francis draws a useful parallel between Lower’s experience in England during the Great War and that of a contemporary Canadian historian-turned-soldier (and later, historian-turned-isolationist), Frank Underhill. Although both men were born in 1889, Underhill’s historical career progressed much faster than Lower’s, having graduated from Oxford University in 1914 and moving immediately into college-level teaching at the University of Saskatchewan. Underhill also beat Lower into the service. He joined the Canadian army in 1915, then quickly transferred to British infantry forces in France where he was wounded at the Battle of the Somme. Francis notes that Underhill, like Lower, suffered his own alienation from his British hosts, but more specifically towards the “upper class English elite,” the same cohort he resented while at Oxford.<sup>21</sup> While Lower lacked that pre-war opportunity for building up the wall between himself and the English, his wartime experience more than served to suffice.

One friend of Lower’s, Bob Beattie, a conscription-exempt young man in Toronto, recognized Lower’s subtle shift in mentality away from Britain and towards Canada. Pleased to hear that Lower had “not relinquished, but rather intensified, the robust Canadianism of your outlook since being ‘over,’” Beattie foresaw a cultural division among the Canadian soldiers who would someday return from Europe. Many would continue to live with England first in their

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<sup>20</sup> Lower, *My First Seventy-Five Years*, 94, 108. A letter from a fellow Canadian soldier serving in British-occupied Mesopotamia sympathized with Lower’s circumstances: “I don’t blame you for getting fed up with the Englishmen at home. In England they stick their nose up at bally colonials, rawhaw! [*sic*] But out here, Art, they are different. They are more like colonials and many of them are practically colonial having been in India for some time.” Lieutenant Percy Sargent to AL, January 9, 1917, ALF Box 1 File 1.

<sup>21</sup> R. Douglas Francis, “Historical Perspectives on Britain: The Ideas of Canadian Historians Frank Underhill and Arthur R.M. Lower,” in *Canada and the British World: Culture, Migration, and Identity*, edited by Philip Bruckner and R. Douglas Francis (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006).

hearts even in peacetime. But for other men, the meaning of their lives would be redirected towards solving “the problems of their own country,” and doing so with a distinct “independence of thought.” This latter group, Beattie anticipated, would be the “decisive” factor in Canada’s post-war future. “If there are enough [of them] they will have the chance of their lives in creating National responsibility [*sic*].”<sup>22</sup>

Many years would pass before he began, but eventually Lower would strive to bring this grandiose prophecy to fruition. For the time being, though, his budding alienation from Britain – a profoundly negative feeling which reached a critical mass in the 1930s – did little to spoil his British patriotism during or immediately after the war. Two cheerful articles describing his service for *The Sailor*, a Toronto-based publication for Canadian naval men, attest to Lower’s initial satisfaction with his personal role in the war.<sup>23</sup> Likewise, he saw no reason to critique the justness of the British cause or the war itself too soon after its conclusion. This was the most persistent and powerful element of Lower’s First World War-era mentality. Only with his turn towards the ideology of isolationism, “fifteen years after the end of the war,” did he finally break with the most sacred myth of that or any other war, that it was still justified in hindsight.<sup>24</sup>

Before he reached that moment of catharsis, Lower continued to develop his Canadian nationalism and to erase his own inner British sentiments. Although he “came back from the war much more of a Canadian than I went into it,” this was a slow process spanning the entire decade of the 1920s, the same period in which he also started to break into the world of higher

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<sup>22</sup> Bob Beattie to AL, July 13, 1918, ALF Box 1 File 1.

<sup>23</sup> A.R.M. Lower, “Extracts from the Log of –,” *The Sailor* 2, No. 4 (November 1919), 12-13, 24-25. A.R.M. Lower, “Two Christmas Nights Afloat,” *The Sailor* 2, No. 5 (December 1919), 22-23, 28-29.

<sup>24</sup> Lower, *My First Seventy-Five Years*, 92. Lower’s dating thus puts the inception of his isolationism around 1933.

education.<sup>25</sup> As part of earning his Master's degree at the University of Toronto, Lower began a career at the Canadian Public Archives in Ottawa, where he lingered after his graduation in 1923. The work was bitterly unsatisfying. Despite serving under the prominent economic historian Adam Shortt, he knew his archival drudgery was not the work of a genuine historian but of a "civil servant," which meant "really to be nothing." Lower had a clear image of what he wanted to become. To fulfill his "secret ambition" of university teaching, and to make himself a recognized "authority on Canadian history," he needed a doctorate.<sup>26</sup>

That mark of true professionalism, however, was to be found at only three Canadian universities at that time: Toronto, McGill, and Queen's. While the option was open for Lower to seek his Ph.D. in England like many of his Canadian contemporaries, he chose to remain in North America instead.<sup>27</sup> In 1925 he went south to the United States, enrolling at Harvard University for the fall term. There he remained for the next four years. This time at Harvard as both a student – studying under the likes of Samuel Elliot Morrison, Edward Channing, and as his mentor, the Cromwell specialist Wilbur Cortez Abbott – and as an instructor in his own right at Radcliff College, accelerated his journey towards the full mastery of his subject. It was also a time for confronting his personal identity as a Canadian.

Opportunities for this self-assessment came immediately on arrival at Cambridge. In his first week at Harvard, Lower attended a reception for foreign students, only to be assured that,

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 139. In the same passage, Lower notes that this was also the period when he turned sharply towards the Liberal Party and made liberalism his political philosophy of choice. Lower also cited his later experience at the 1932 Imperial Economic Conference in Ottawa – observing the Conservative Prime Minister R.B. Bennett profess "filial affection towards Great Britain" as he pushed hard for Canadian trade advantages – as having finally "cured me of any lingering ancestral attachment I had still felt for Canadian Toryism." Ibid., 187.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 132-33.

<sup>27</sup> For details on Lower's choice of a Ph.D. program and the experience of other Canadian historians of his generation, see Chapter 3, "'The post-1918 generation': professionalization continued," in Donald Wright, *The Professionalization of History in English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 52-81.

from the American perspective, “Canadians are not foreigners” at all. While Lower recalled that, indeed, “[n]o one every treated me as one,” he was recognizably foreign in another way; not as a Canadian, but as a “British subject.” This was Lower’s national stamp in the eyes of some of his professors and close friends alike, and despite the university’s general atmosphere of Anglophilia, it opened him up to “amicable” teasing along American nationalist lines.<sup>28</sup>

Amidst these scholarly travels, academic challenges, and professional toil, Lower’s nationalism matured. It was an evolution clearly demarcated by two seminal articles. The first, published in a small nationalist magazine from Montreal, *The Listening Post*, was Lower’s first public act of dissent towards Britain and the place of British patriotism within Canada. That criticism, however, was coupled with an even harsher critique of the United States. The article was ostensibly a counter-point against a piece in the magazine’s previous issue, an inflammatory polemic advocating for the annexation of Canada by its neighbor.<sup>29</sup> Much of Lower’s article was thus a justification of Canada’s independence from the United States. Americanization was not merely a looming social threat, but an ongoing process by which English Canada in particular was “fast being swamped by modern American culture.” To repel this existential danger, Lower called on Canadians to dedicated themselves to a high spiritual task: finding a national “soul” to distinguish their country from its southern counterpart. The cost of failure was plain. “We must either have a national soul, as have all great nations... or disappear.”<sup>30</sup>

But before this “national soul-searching” could begin, Canadians needed to engage in national self-reflection. What was Canada as a country, what was the basis of its existence to

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<sup>28</sup>Lower, *My First Seventy-Five Years*, 154-55.

<sup>29</sup> Bostonian, “Sand Against the Wind: Canada under the Stars and Stripes?” *The Listening Post* 3, No. 3 (March 1925).

<sup>30</sup> A.R.M. Lower, “Calling Our Souls Our Own: What is Our Future?” *The Listening Post* 3, No. 5 (May 1925), 24.

date, and what kept it united despite its myriad of internal divisions? Each of these Lower answered for his readers. In the process, he added critical new elements to his own understanding of Canadian history and Canadian national identity. Canada's cultural core was a fusion of "the Puritan tradition of New England" and "British political institutions," a foundation to which emerging customs of "indigenous" creation were slowly being added. Reiterating the same definitions of "nation" and "nationality" he had discovered in 1915, Lower saw the tense coexistence of Canada's two component nationalities – English and French – as no bar to its nationhood. In fact, Canada's "mere existence" in spite of this and other divides showed that "the forces of union must be stronger than the forces of disruption."<sup>31</sup>

Those unifying forces, however, were deeply troubling for Lower. By his account, only two bonds held Canada together: "sentiment for the British flag combined with a strong dash of hostility towards anything savoring of American domination."<sup>32</sup> Neither of these "exterior things" were a legitimate basis for a Canadian nation or a Canadian soul, but the first of the pair was especially "unstable." That new word in Lower's nationalist vocabulary, *sentiment*, would from this time forward become a literal hallmark of his writing. Virtually every successive article on the subject of Britain and its place in Canadian society would utilize this potent and versatile term, one which was meant to summon up a laundry list of negative connotations.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

<sup>32</sup> Lower's assessment bears a resemblance to a more current historian's description of the two constant themes in Canadian national identity before the First World War and into the interwar decades: "... the United States remained the principle 'Other' against which Canadians defined themselves, and 'Britishness' remained indispensable to new versions of 'Canadian-ness.'" John Herd Thompson, "Canada and the 'Third British Empire', 1901-1939," in *Canada and the British Empire*, edited by Phillip Buckner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 101.



Canada's "mysterious sentiment" for Britain, Lower mused, was "sufficient to have preserved it" against the prosperity promised by American annexation. It was indeed "the British flag, the British connection which appears to keep the country together." But, he continued:

... this unity is blind. One part of Canada [i.e. Quebec] feels no loyalty to what has been referred to above as a curious symbol – the flag (not the Canadian ensign, which is a very obscure symbol indeed, but the Union Jack) – curious because, though meaningless in itself, it, an inanimate thing, possesses so much power over us... it sums up all the queer odds and ends of racial sense, self-sacrifice, medieval devotion to a throne, imaginative glimpses of a great world-wide unity, that lie in untidy heaps in the dusty, unfrequented corners of all our hearts and minds...<sup>33</sup>

The language of this description – mystery, blindness, a whole people living under the power of a symbol – suggests something more than mere irrationality; it borders on describing British sentiment as a kind of cult. This was undoubtedly a very deliberate choice on the author's part. Lower would retain this religious framing for his nationalist argument through the decades to come. As he labeled his unifying nationalist creed a Canadian "national faith," so too did he deride British sentiment as a hollow faith that did little to serve Canada as the country it was.

Lower received a modicum of praise for his *Listening Post* article. Two of his former professors from the University of Toronto, the historians George Wrong and W.P.M. Kennedy, personally wrote to congratulate him on taking such a bold stand, and an English newspaper even gave the piece a considerate review.<sup>34</sup> But the young historian did not rest on those laurels. While at Harvard, Lower continued to question and criticize his country's relationship to Great Britain and its empire. In 1927, he gave voice to his still burgeoning nationalism through another article, this time in a British academic journal. The still evolving ties between Britain, the imperial metropole, and its distant Dominions were already becoming a major focus of Lower's historical

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<sup>33</sup> Lower, "Calling Our Souls Our Own," 24.

<sup>34</sup> The letters from Wrong and Kennedy and the undated clipping from the *Tunbridge Argus*, "Canada and the Future" (with an accompanying letter from the office of the *Listening Post*) can be found in AFL Box 11 File 26.

work, but the main thesis of this piece also found its way into the very core of his isolationist position during the 1930s.

Written half-a-decade before the Statute of Westminster opened the way for Canada to exercise its own foreign policy, the article did not propose that the Dominion break with Britain's imperial leadership outright.<sup>35</sup> Yet Lower's assessment of the titular "sentimental idea of empire" – the cultural and familial affection which made imperial unity possible – pointed towards just such a future. That bond of "pure emotion," based on an idealized conception of Britain as the perfect center of the empire, was not a product of that center imposed onto its colonial periphery. Rather, "it was in the colonies, not in the motherland, that there originated and developed... the sentimental view of empire."<sup>36</sup>

This thesis, one which Lower would reassert through the decade to come, had a double meaning. Above all, it meant that English Canadians as a people, and Canada as a young nation, were still choosing to wear the mental chains of colonialism even as they assumed greater political independence. The second meaning was a message sent abroad, a caution to British policymakers. They ought to be mindful as they dictated the overall direction of the Commonwealth, for "[f]irst among forces of centrifugal nature stands the developing nationalism in the Dominions."<sup>37</sup> For Lower, this was no idle prophecy. Although it implied inevitability, it was a volatile historical process that he consciously worked to influence. His work as a

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<sup>35</sup> The relevant section of the Statute reads: "3. It is hereby declared that the Parliament of a Dominion has full power to make laws having extra-territorial operation." Quoted in *Canadian Historical Documents Series*, Vol. 3, *Confederation to 1949*, edited by R.C. Brown and M.E. Prang (Scarborough, ON: Prentice-Hall, 1966), 302. The eminent C.P. Stacey puts the sheer significance of the Statute well; "if one seeks for a date on which Canada became independent, there is no other one to be had than December 11, 1931." C.P. Stacey, *Canada and the Age of Conflict* Vol. 2, 135.

<sup>36</sup> Arthur Lower, "The Evolution of the Sentimental Idea of Empire – A Canadian View," *History*, new series, 11 (January 1927), 300, 296.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 302.

professional historian was augmented by this other responsibility, the shaping of Canadian national identity and the Canadian national path.

### **The Tide Comes In, 1930-1933**

Arthur Lower began the 1930s on a new footing. Having graduated from Harvard in 1929, he accepted a position at Wesley College in Winnipeg, Manitoba as a professor of history and as the chair of its History Department. Assuming his post in the fall of 1929, there he would remain through the decade to come and into the 1940s, years in which he would produce much of his best known academic writing on Canadian economic, environmental, and national history.<sup>38</sup>

Fortunate as he was to have a steady job at the onset of the Great Depression, and to have achieved his professional dream so completely, Lower found much to dislike in the taxing workload of authentic professorship (a burden compounded by a recurring struggle with cataracts that nearly left him blind on several occasions). His new environment was another source of discomfort. The Canadian Prairieland was a far cry from his birthplace in small town Ontario, and from the cultural meccas of his early professional life, Toronto and Ottawa. Even more difficult to adapt to was Lower's new home city. The Winnipeg area teemed with continental European immigrants, a multiethnic reality which ran starkly counter to Lower's own ideal of a bi-cultural Canada defined by English and French alone.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Lower's three outstanding monographs of this period are *Select Documents in Canadian Economic History, 1783-1885*, with Harold Innis (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1933), *The North American Assault on the Canadian Forrest: A History of the Lumber Trade between Canada and the United States* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1938), and *Colony to Nation: A History of Canada* (Toronto: Longmans, Green, 1946).

<sup>39</sup> Even before his move to the west, immigration and its effects on Canada had become one of Lower's main areas of interest as a social scientist. He was an outspoken opponent of mass immigration at its height in the late-1920s and remained so even after it was effectively cut off in 1931, privately remarking that, as an English Canadian, the after-effects of the great influx made him "pessimistic about the future of our race. A Winnipeg angle makes one so." AL to J.A. Stevenson, December 1, 1934, ALF Box 1 File 6.

Yet Winnipeg and the Canadian west were also a place of revelation for Lower. It was there that he completed his transformation into a dedicated promoter of Canadian nationalism, an unabashed critic of “British sentiment,” and an advocate of isolationism as the political fulfilment of the former and a cultural check against the latter. In the years following his move to Winnipeg, Lower’s process of personal detachment from Britain intensified, but again, it was not until 1933 that he felt able to make an explicit and aggressive call for a break with Britain on foreign policy grounds. Before that year, his primary nationalist interests centered exclusively around Canada’s internal development – relations between the provinces and the federal government, the appropriate division of power between the two, and the immigration question – rather than its external relationship with Britain.<sup>40</sup>

Still, as Lower’s national focus turned inward in the opening years of the 1930s, the dilemmas posed by Canada’s British connection remained in his mind, allowing fractional elements of his later isolationist position to percolate in the background. This was apparent even before the Statute of Westminster was signed in December of 1931. Nine months prior, at a lecture ostensibly devoted to impressing the need for a strong central government as a guarantee of Canadian unity, Lower abruptly ventured into the sphere of Canada’s relationship with Britain and its empire. While only a brief aside within a thirty-plus page speech, the substance of the passage was an assertion of Canada’s natural right to determine its own foreign policy. The “Imperial tie” linking Canada and Britain was acceptable, Lower declared, but only on the condition of its reform as a “free bond between self-respecting equals.” Personifying Canada in

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<sup>40</sup> An apt example of this tendency is an enormous article Lower wrote for his preferred city newspaper, “A Five-Year Plan for Canada,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, December 11, 1932. In contrast to his nationalist writing from 1933 to 1939, the piece is almost entirely focused on his recommendations for domestic policy, the only exception being his demand for the abolition of the system of appealing Canadian legal decisions to the British Privy Council as the “highest court” of Canada. This was a point which Lower hammered on frequently until the practice was repealed after the Second World War.

the form of a young “Jack Canuck” and taking on that role for himself, Lower slyly aired his individual grievances as those of his entire nation:

... I do not feel that I am in a position consistent with self-respect if I have to call on somebody else, even a close friend, to manage my affairs for me. I shall feel very much better disposed to my kindred if they run their business and I run mine... The man (or the country) who cannot mind his own business is popular nowhere... They [the British] assume that I, Jack Canuck, am grown up, and I think I ought to assume it too, I ought to stand squarely on my own feet. Then if another great emergency comes, as it did in 1914, I shall be free to aid my kindred with every means at my disposal. But my aid will be freely given. That is the effect, the very salutary effect, which the complete and unfettered control of our own affairs will have on our relations with the mother land.<sup>41</sup>

This statement is can easily be recognized as an imitation of Mackenzie King’s famous fly-by-night policy for explaining Canada’s path in the event of future British war; “Parliament will decide.”<sup>42</sup> But Lower’s argument – reasonable enough on the surface as a kind of compromise between Canadian national pride and British colonial loyalty – was, in fact, premised on a contradiction. His demand for independent rights was qualified with a self-negating concession; an assurance that a Canada empowered with external sovereignty would, at the moment of decision, and without any apparent regard for its own national interests, make no different a choice than if it was still a colony under *de jure* British control.

Later in the 1930s, a shadow of this argument would reappear in Lower’s foreign affairs worldview. But in the short term, a guarantee of military support if the “choice” was Canada’s was a promise he could not keep. Within two years it was completely abandoned. “Self-respect” would remain a keynote of his nationalist appeals, and the simple maxim of “minding one’s own

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<sup>41</sup> “Strengthening Confederation, Address to Canadian Clubs,” MS, February 1931, ALF Box 20 File 188, 28-29.

<sup>42</sup> Compare Lower’s accommodating statement with, for instance, this one from 1923 by then-Prime Minister King at the London Imperial Conference; “Our attitude [Canada’s] is not one of unconditional isolation, nor is it one of unconditional intervention,” but “if a great call of duty comes, Canada will respond.” Quoted in John Herd Thompson, “Canada and the ‘Third British Empire’,” 104.

business” was a core tenet of his isolationist platform. But by 1933, the prospect of Canada’s participation in another war for Britain was unacceptable for Lower under any conditions.

Asserting that provocative point, however, required another one to support it. In 1931, Lower could still honestly refer to 1914 as a “great emergency,” implying that both Britain’s war and Canada’s aid were necessary and legitimate. But to justify Canadian neutrality in the event of another Great War, he first had to challenge the powerful dogma surrounding the original conflict. In sum, he needed to write his own “counter-account” of the First World War.

This was a painful position for Lower to arrive at, both as an English Canadian and as a former soldier with a four-year personal investment in the war. For a decade-and-a-half after its end, there was not even a shade of skepticism about the World War in Lower’s published writing. “For me,” Lower recalled in his memoir, “(as for tens of thousands more) the First World War had been a crusade; we were fighting FOR THE RIGHT [*sic*].” While other nations had the pride and self-consciousness to fight for self-serving reasons, for their own “*national interest*,” merely “introducing such an explanation into our motivation, prior to about 1945, [would] have been considered just wicked!”<sup>43</sup>

Wicked, indeed. A critical view of the World War was an exceptionally difficult one to take publicly during the postwar decades. Jonathan Vance, in his intensive history of the First World War’s legacy in Canada, asserts that a reverent memory of the war – and of the myths that so tightly intertwined with the plainer facts – was an almost universally accepted position in interwar English Canada. The popular memory the Great War as a “just war” against an evil enemy, as a defense of high moral ideals, and as a necessary sacrifice for the construction of a

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<sup>43</sup> Lower, *My First Seventy-Five Years*, 184. Emphasis in the original.

lasting international peace, spanned the full breadth of anglophone Canadian society.<sup>44</sup> As Vance poignantly notes, for every conspicuous and articulate revisionist to be found in the halls of Canadian academia, “there were countless Canadians who aired conflicting views just as passionately in the rather less august fora of the small-town newspaper, the smoky Canadian Legion hall, and the IODE [Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire] meeting.”<sup>45</sup>

These, however, were precisely the minds that Lower aimed to influence with all the means at his disposal. After the Great War, he recalled, he gradually “passed from being a British subject to being a Canadian; my centre of vision had changed, as had my centre of allegiance.”<sup>46</sup> It was his goal to take the rest of the English Canadian people with him through that transition. By 1933, he was convinced; “if Canada were not to go through the whole bloody mess of 1914-18 over again, she would have to reduce imperial ties to the minimum and make herself in spirit what she was in the letter, an independent nation. And given the English Canadian people, there was absolutely no prospect of her doing any such thing.”<sup>47</sup>

The history of interwar Canadian revisionists is easily overshadowed by their more famous counterparts to the south. Beginning in the 1920s and continuing their work in earnest thought the following decade, a legion of American scholars and journalists like Charles Beard, C. Hartley Grattan, and Oswald Garrison Villard made a cottage industry of demystifying the Great War through a steady stream of critical books and articles. The voices of likeminded Canadians, meanwhile, while significantly fewer in number, grew increasingly loud at the start

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<sup>44</sup> Jonathan Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 6-7. In that same passage, Vance specifically names O.D. Skelton, Escott Reid, Frank Underhill, and Arthur Lower as examples of some of the most prominent Great War revisionists in interwar Canada.

<sup>46</sup> Lower, *My First Seventy-Five Years*, 229. As this occurred, Lower also found that his “critical propensities had widened” simultaneously, an almost comically understated personal truth.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 189.

of the 1930s. While Arthur Lower was not the earliest proponent of Canadian First World War revisionism, he was certainly part of its initial wave. The premier outlet for this perspective was the left-liberal magazine *Canadian Forum*, to which Lower was a satisfied subscriber by 1931.<sup>48</sup> From there he had access to the cutting edge of Great War skepticism, British Empire criticism, and Canadian nationalism, a triad well illustrated by the work of Frank Underhill, an associate editor of the magazine and one of its regular contributors.<sup>49</sup>

In addition, by 1933 Lower had deeply integrated himself into local and nation-wide networks of Canadians interested in international issues, in Canada's place in the world, and more than incidentally, in Canadian nationalism. Within weeks of his arrival in Winnipeg in 1929, Lower was introduced to E.J. Tarr, a prominent lawyer and President of the Association of Canadian Clubs (the same group Lower spoke before in 1931), and to J.W. Dafoe, editor of Winnipeg's largest newspaper – the *Free Press* – and one of the most influential liberals in Canadian media.<sup>50</sup> Tarr and Dafoe were also key members of the Winnipeg branch of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs (CIIA). A small but highly coordinated organization of individual “study groups” scattered across the larger Canadian cities, the Institute served as a private gathering place for intellectuals, business elites, and (some) policymakers to discuss

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<sup>48</sup> Lower recommended the magazine to his sister Jessie, writing of it: “... while rather highbrow, [it] has some pretty good things in it and is the only magazine in Canada that dares to speak its mind these days and call a spade a spade. I think it ought to be patronized...” AL to Jessie Lower, December 11, 1931, ALF Box 1 File 4.

<sup>49</sup> Underhill's biographer notes, however, that it was his socialism more than his nationalism that first prompted his extremely strong anti-imperialism, as well as his conviction that Canada fought in the First World War to defend Britain's imperial interests rather than democracy. R. Douglas Francis, *Frank H. Underhill: Intellectual Provocateur* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1986), 93-94.

<sup>50</sup> Lower, *My First Seventy-Five Years*, 176-179. Lower also notes that through his Winnipeg connections he became casually acquainted with Canada's leading social democrat, J.S. Woodsworth, head of the Canadian Commonwealth Federation and, by a wide margin, the single highest profile Canadian anti-interventionist of the 1930s. For an overview of Woodsworth's neutralism, see Kenneth McNaught, *A Prophet in Politics: A Biography of J.S. Woodsworth* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1960), 281-312. For details on J.W. Dafoe's influential stances on liberalism, internationalism, and support for the League of Nations, see Ramsey Cook, *The Politics of John W. Dafoe and the Free Press* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963).



world events and the precise nature Canada's external interests. Tyler Turek notes that while the group was officially non-partisan, in practice it promoted a continentalist strain of nationalism that defined Canada as an essentially "North American" state. From this basis, its leadership generally "viewed imperial sentiments negatively" and invested much of its public education efforts to securing Canada's "right to neutrality" before another European conflict broke out.<sup>51</sup>

Although it is unclear when exactly he joined the organization, by the early months of 1933 Lower had become the chairman of the Winnipeg branch, thus giving him an additional connection to the Institute's national director in Toronto, Escott Reid.<sup>52</sup> In his memoir, Lower cited his intense participation in the Institute, together with a torrent of writing and public speaking on his own initiative, as the primary forces for change in his intellectual life. Through these efforts, he gradually formed his own "considered philosophy" for understanding Canada's position in the world. The Winnipeg branch for him was a place of "never-ceasing debate," one where the "old comfortable assumptions – the King's in his heaven and all's right with the British world – were badly disturbed." So badly, in fact, that Lower himself became, in his own words, "one of the chief of those who came to be talking 'treason'" about Canada's British relationship.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Tyler Turek, "Mobilizing Imperial Sentiment: Identities, Institutions, and Information in British Canada's Road to War, 1937-1940," *Canadian Studies*, No. 75 (2013), 24-25. Turek gives a stark illustration of just how small the CIHA was by contrast to its more imperially sentimental counterparts. In 1939, the CIHA had a membership of 1,190 with branches in just seventeen major Canadian cities. The Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire, meanwhile, had a membership of 25,000 women in 600 local branches, while the servicemen's fraternity, the Canadian Legion, had over 170,000 members in 1,500 branches across the North American continent. *Ibid.*, 17-21.

<sup>52</sup> Although Lower and the mercurial Reid disagreed on many points – as a socialist, Reid was significantly more committed to international organization – they firmly concurred with one another on the importance of distancing Canada from Britain and ensuring it stayed out any potential foreign wars. Wrote Lower: "I do not really think there is any essential difference between our points of view as I take it that what we are both trying to do is to think about the situation of this country in as realistic terms as possible and without allowing ourselves to be influenced by sentimental considerations." AL to Escott Reid, April 11, 1933, ALF Box 52 File 21.

<sup>53</sup> Lower, *My First Seventy-Five Years*, 179-80.

“Treason,” here, was not merely hindsight hyperbole. From the outset of his career as an isolationist, Lower would learn well that there were real dangers for English Canadians who openly stood against Britain, British sentiment, and the memory of the Great War.

In the spring of 1933, ominous rumblings of war across the Atlantic offered Lower a convenient opportunity for airing his newest and most radical views. A grim moment in an already grim decade with the ascent of Hitler to power (as well as the withdrawal of Japan from the League of Nations), the course of world events merged with influences in Arthur Lower’s personal life into a storm of iconoclastic feeling. In a letter to the editor of the *Free Press* written from his office in Wesley’s History Department on March 15<sup>th</sup>, he let that storm break loose for the first time, his rhetoric overflowing with resentment and bitterness so intense it reads as if it had festered for years. The truth, however, is that it was only the beginning.<sup>54</sup>

And Lower began at the beginning. He looked backwards in time to 1914, when Canada, “not then in control of its own destinies,” followed Britain dutifully into a war not at all its own, and one whose true nature was totally misunderstood. In 1914, “there was hardly a dissentient voice as to the duty of this country... Everyone believed the shibboleths that were then so common.” But with nineteen years of hindsight, “many of us are not nearly as sure that all the right was on the one side as we were then.” Lower put the reality bluntly. The war was fought neither for Belgium, nor democracy, nor any other high ideal, but for “saving France,” the same country whose invidious post-war foreign policy was responsible for the mounting European tension between itself and a “spirit in the shape of a resurgent Germany.” Yet again, the prospect of Britain having to “pull the chestnuts [of France] out of the fire” looked increasingly likely,

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<sup>54</sup> The MS of Lower’s letter makes its importance to his public life in the 1930s unambiguously clear. Handwritten in pen at the top of the sheet are two words, without further comment: “*Opening Gun*.” “Letter to the Editor, Winnipeg *Free Press*,” MS, March 15, 1933, ALF Box 12 File 8.

and once more the danger of Canadian involvement in a faraway struggle mounted in turn. Describing circumstances painfully similar to those of his own enlistment, Lower thrust towards the core Canada's unique dilemma, the burden and the danger of British sentiment: "...the average person [in 1914] believed in the British cause not because he was intellectually convinced through a knowledge of the facts, but because he could not resist the wave of emotion that by one means or another was set going."

If this was the path that led to Canada's participation in the war, and thus the path never to be repeated, an alternative had to be found. The peoples of Europe, Lower wrote, "must work out their own salvation." Nothing Canada could do would ever allay their unresolvable feuds. More than this, though, another, stronger line had to be drawn between the Canadian nation and Britain. "Whatever course Great Britain elects to pursue... our course here in Canada is clear."

On no excuse whatever must this country plunge into a war which does not concern it. The blood and treasure spent from 1914 to 1918 will not have been sent in vain if we have learned our lesson, which is, roughly, to mind our own business, but if we once more plunge blindly and emotionally into a war which none of us understand, then we shall deserve the fate that will certainly descend upon us... a much more complete disorganization of our national life than exists even at present.

I go so far as to say that regardless of Great Britain's action, whether she be involved in a war or not, we in Canada must keep the peace. There must be no war in which our own vital interests are not immediately at stake and I defy anyone to prove that Canadian safety can in any real degree be menaced by a war in Europe.<sup>55</sup>

Although some important elements are missing (the League of Nations and the United States are conspicuously absent), the main points of this letter set the original pattern on which Lower's more mature isolationism would be modeled. The primary message was to emphasize that Canada's natural, geographic security required additional, political detachment from Europe generally and Britain specifically. To avoid the dangers of ties to those fallen idols – and

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<sup>55</sup> A.R.M. Lower, "Canada and War," *Winnipeg Free Press*, March 18, 1933.

particularly a danger only briefly hinted at, the destruction of Canadian society by the tensions of war – only a policy of “mind our own business” would be the country’s saving grace.

All this Lower grounded in his understanding of the World War, an interpretation defined by pessimism and regret. Canada had fought not for itself, but was dragged in by a combination of colonial obligation and the Canadian colonial mentality. Regarding the latter, it was the responsibility of Canadians themselves to break with it, a feat which required saying no to Britain when it demanded service on grounds of loyalty. Here also was an especially critical point for Lower, a simple but crucial dialectic that separated his own position of nationalism, national interests, and realism from the British sentiment, British interests, and blind emotionalism which he saw predominating among the English Canadian public.

Lower’s letter created a minor controversy in the offices of Wesley College. The principle of the college, Dr. J.H. Riddell, was placed in the awkward position of defending the speech of one of his professors from some irate readers of the *Free Press*.<sup>56</sup> Although he received no complimentary correspondence from any of his academic colleagues as he had for his article of 1925 and would again for future pieces, Lower did take in a handful of fan mail from Winnipeg locals impressed with his candor. One man, “a private in the late war,” was particularly pleased, complimenting Lower on his evasion of censorship by the ““powers that be”” and optimistically assuring him that their mutually held views were shared by “90 percent of our Canadian people, according to my daily experience.”<sup>57</sup> Another reader similarly echoed

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<sup>56</sup> Lower proudly recalled the scene in a letter to his wife; “Dr. Riddell told me some fellow called up and complained about his allowing his professors to say such things. ‘The fellow is a regular German’ (that’s me!) the gentleman himself having the very English name of Dojack. The chief said he didn’t superintend the thinking of his staff. The whole thing arose out of the study group of the Institute of which I have been chairman and which has inevitably had a good deal to say about the present situation in Europe. My view was that a war in Europe was none of this country’s business.” AL to Evelyn Lower, March 19, 1933, ALF Box 66 File 1.

<sup>57</sup> Neil P. Reid to AL, March 19, 1933, ALF Box 12 File 8.

Lower's perspective, boldly adding that the surest "road towards peace" was a foreign policy in the vein of George Washington's Farewell Address, "friendly diplomacy towards all and secret alliances with none."<sup>58</sup> If Lower had not already begun taken these views deeply to heart, these letters from sympathetic Canadians would have been a compelling cue to do so.

As it so happened, it was not long at all before Lower expanded the position he tentatively outlined in March for the *Free Press*. Before the end of the month, he submitted the manuscript of a long article to *The Nineteenth Century and After*, a prominent British literary magazine.<sup>59</sup> The piece, which sacrificed some of its precursor's biting tone, was largely an elaboration of the points in the *Free Press* letter with the infusion of new arguments for support. In 1927, when he published his article on the "sentimental view of empire" in another British journal, Lower did not have the luxury of open advocacy for a distinctly Canadian foreign policy, much less an openly isolationist one. In 1933, he was fully empowered to do just that. Hostility to "sentiment" now moved to the forefront of Lower's writing, an integral element of the historian's struggle to sway the public mind about Canada's still fluid international course.

Two years after the Statute of Westminster, Great Britain, its Empire, and Canada were at the beginning of a new era. A British push to reassert its leadership of the Commonwealth, a "centralized or united foreign policy," was no longer possible. The political ties between the Dominions and the imperial center were effectively severed, and Britain's navy embarrassingly forced to share oceanic power with the United States and Japan. Canada had no national interest in the defense of the British Empire, and Lower backhandedly criticized Britain's assertions of

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<sup>58</sup> D.W. Buchanan to AL, March 18, 1933, ALF Box 12 File 8.

<sup>59</sup> The article did not come out until the journal's September issue, but in the opening days of April Lower requested the aid of his wife (then in Folkstone, England visiting her parents) in mailing the original MS back to him from London, probably for revisions. AL to Evelyn Lower, April 2, 1933, ALF Box 66 File 1.

other nations' "immorality" by questioning its own tarnished history of "accumulating territory" by conquest. The "one element of unity holding together the white nations of the Empire" was the "intangible but none the less real bond of sentiment." But emotion and dependency were no basis for a "dignified" Canadian foreign policy.<sup>60</sup> For that, Canadians themselves would have to account for the realities of their international position and chart a course on their own terms.

As an export-dependent nation, a "rigorously isolationist" policy was precluded on economic grounds; Canada's "chief interests" were peace and free trade. Finally introducing the United States into his argument, Lower insisted that the "cornerstone" of any Canadian foreign policy had to be the maintenance of warm relations with its great neighbor. Canada had "little to fear from the extra-American world," and no "full-dress invasion" of the country from without was possible. In truth, Canada's only "potential enemy," the one country which could genuinely "threaten [its] national existence," was the United States. Dark as that possibility was, it was even less likely that an attack by a non-North American power. Crucially, Lower did see Canada as having an interest in "international control" through the League of Nations. But, he qualified, this was only acceptable with a "limited assumption of responsibility" commensurate with the realities of Canada's geopolitical size, power, and national interests.<sup>61</sup>

Again offering unsolicited advice to British policymakers, Lower took a more authoritative and belligerent tone than he had in 1927. Speculating that any future British war would "certainly see the Dominions at once declare themselves neutral," the preservation of the empire meant that Britain, too, "must at all costs be kept out of European quarrels," a policy which Lower admitted came "unpleasantly close to peace at any price." The article's remarkable

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<sup>60</sup> Arthur Lower, "Foreign Policy and the Empire: A Canadian View" *The Nineteenth Century and After* 114, No. 679 (September 1933), 258.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 261-63.

final line makes plain Lower's inspiration for an ideal foreign policy; "George Washington's advice to his countrymen a century and a quarter ago is still good advice to Canadians [today]: friendship towards all, but entangling alliances with none."<sup>62</sup>

With these two pieces, both born in the spring of 1933, Lower had laid almost the entire foundation for the isolationism he would promote through the six years to follow. He advocated a simple policy of "mind our own business"-style neutrality. He was confident that Canada's geographic position and closeness the United States made it invulnerable to attack, and that no threats from overseas existed in any event. He was certain that greatest threat to Canadian security was its British connection, and that Canadians' sentimental loyalty to that tainted great power did not promote their own country's national interests but rather endangered them.

Where the second piece clearly breaks with Lower's isolationism from the rest of the 1930s, however, is in the wild over-confidence of its conclusion. Canadian readers of the time might have wondered why Lower bothered to write at all, based on his self-assured prediction that Canada would "certainly" be neutral if Britain ever went to war again.<sup>63</sup> This confidence quickly evaporated. Never again would Lower be so sure that Canada would follow his desired course of action. Just the opposite, in fact. The defining tenor of his later articles and speeches was one of bitter, desperate struggle against the real paramount factor deciding Canada's foreign affairs – persistent sentiment for Britain and the Empire.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 263-64.

<sup>63</sup> Although Lower's *Nineteenth Century* article gained more attention after 1934, just one of his peers – R.A. MacKay, professor of history at Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia – was impressed enough with the piece to write him when it was new (but only after Lower mailed him a copy personally). A fellow Canadian nationalist with strong isolationist leanings, MacKay had only one criticism for Lower, "that you were several years ahead of the Canadian public, though they will probably be carried in the direction you indicate by the very logic of circumstances." R.A. MacKay to AL, December 22, 1933, ALF Box 1 File 5.

Through these same months of early 1933 that Lower was writing his first public statements of isolationism, he was also planning an extended tour of Europe for the coming summer. The trip's ostensible purpose was researching the Baltic and Northern European timber trades, a subject well in line with his main area of Canadian historical research. Although the travel itself was officially funded through a generous \$700 grant from the U.S.-based Social Science Research Council, privately, Lower saw the trip as a much needed "holiday."<sup>64</sup>

Travelling first through England and from there to the continent, Lower's trip took him to Denmark, Germany, Poland, and the lower Baltic states before reaching Russia. There he rendezvoused with Jack Pickersgill, a close friend and colleague in Wesley's history department, for a side trip to Moscow. After parting ways, Lower went via Leningrad to Finland, and then on to Sweden where he was joined by his wife Evelyn and his sister Jessie. They then travelled together back to Britain for an extended stay until their return to Canada in the late summer.<sup>65</sup>

In his memoir, Lower described the European journey as one of the highlights of his life, going into considerable detail on his experiences in all the countries he visited. All, that is, except for Germany. Here Lower's writing becomes evasive, stating only that, at the time, "Germany under Hitler was just getting under way, and the true nature of the regime was still to come out."<sup>66</sup> Naturally, the truth of his German experience is more complicated than this opaque and abbreviated summary. Indeed, the omission is made even more conspicuous by the fact that Lower was a fluent German speaker, making Germany the only country besides Britain where he could have communicated in the native language.

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<sup>64</sup> AL to Evelyn Lower, April 2, 1933, Box 66 File 1.

<sup>65</sup> For the relevant section of the memoir, see Lower, *My First Seventy-Five Years*, 187-91.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 189. This ambiguous statement also contradicts a later comment in the memoir about Lower's around-the-world post-retirement trip of 1959, that "one glimpse of a country is worth a shelf of books about it." *Ibid.*, 371.



Arthur Lower visited only one part of Germany during his 1933 trip, the exclave province of East Prussia, and within that only two cities, first Danzig (at the time an independent city-state), and then the provincial capital of Königsberg. The latter made an extremely strong impression on him, one plainly visible in his words and actions immediately afterwards and in the year to come. In an address at the University of Manitoba in early 1934, a speech which he quickly converted into article form for one of the school's student journals,<sup>67</sup> Lower described his moment in Königsberg briefly but in fawning terms:

I was in this pleasant East Prussian city myself this summer. I had just been in Warsaw, where I saw more soldiers and more militarism (and more inefficiency) than I saw altogether in Germany. Our Ko[n]igsburg friends did not appear to be worrying overmuch about war: [in the] evening, they all seemed to be in the dozen attractive beer gardens along the river, lingering for hours in family parties, extracting simple enjoyment from watching the play of coloured lights within the fountains.<sup>68</sup>

The intended function of this literally glowing memory was not simply to flaunt Lower's personal experience in Germany, but to further one of the main goals of the talk itself; assuring his audience of young Canadian college students that the "present pet horror" of ever-imminent war was totally unfounded.<sup>69</sup> The "hysteria" surrounding Germany and Hitler rang especially hollow to him. "In my opinion," he said, "G[ermany] and H[itler] are both definitely less aggressive than is usually assumed and H[itler]'s pre-office utterances [i.e. *Mein Kampf*] are not

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<sup>67</sup> A.R.M. Lower, "Europe, War and Canada," *Manitoba Arts Quarterly* 1, No. 3 (March 1934), 16-17, 24.

<sup>68</sup> "Europe, War and Canada: Address to students of the University of Manitoba, Winter, 1934," MS, page 9, AFL Box 20, File 195. The MS of this lecture lacks the specific date it was given, but references to articles published no later than early February put the date of delivery sometime during that month, rather than in December of 1934 as the "Winter" heading might otherwise suggest.

<sup>69</sup> Besides his own experience, Lower also cited "an excellent article" by another expatriate history professor in Königsberg at the very same time, a man whose "impressions perfectly coincide with mine, i.e., the German people are not out for war." Ibid., page 7. The author of that article – "Impressions of Germany," *The Nineteenth Century and After* 115 (January 1934), 72-82 – was an Englishman named Philip Conwell-Evans, later one of the cofounders of the Anglo-German Fellowship, a far-right political action group with direct connections to Nazi leaders that promoted a friendlier relationship between Britain and Germany. Robert Griffiths, *Fellow Travelers of the Right: British Enthusiasts for Nazi Germany, 1933-1939* (London: Constable, 1980), 146-49, 184-85.

to be taken at their full face value.”<sup>70</sup> Thus, like his “friends” in Königsberg, Lower, too, was at ease. Even more so, in fact, as he counted himself downright “optimistic amidst a pessimistic world.” He was confident that war between Germany and any combination of European powers was “a good deal farther off than most people suppose” and “may be obviated altogether” before it even had the chance to start.<sup>71</sup>

It was one of the few points he did not mention in his very detailed address, but Lower already had a specific technique in mind for “obviating” that potential European war. Before he left England for the continent, Lower met in London with Lord Lothian, a prominent Liberal politician and an early advocate for a policy of appeasement towards Nazi Germany.<sup>72</sup> Although the direct impact of his conversation with Lothian is unclear, the Canadian historian’s views rapidly came into line with those of the British lord.<sup>73</sup> In Leningrad in July, Lower made close contact with the British Consul, Reader Bullard, regarding the theft of some of his luggage and the refusal of Soviet authorities to give him any kind of compensation.<sup>74</sup> Besides this personal problem, their conversations also drifted deep into European affairs. Writing long after Lower had left Russia, Bullard hoped that they might “continue the discussion which began with your

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<sup>70</sup> There is more direct evidence beyond this statement that Lower was familiar with *Mein Kampf*. In 1937, after a former Wesley student of his travelled to Berlin to study philosophy, Lower wrote the young man with a peculiar request, inquiring “if you could purchase and send me a couple copies of the book of books, Mein Kampf. I should have a German edition.” AL to Mervin Sprung, January 18, 1937, ALF Box 1 File 9. Lower received the German volumes that spring, duly remitting the student for his costs but still saying nothing about the destination of the copies other than the one he claimed for himself. AL to Mervin Sprung, April 3, 1937, ALF Box 1 File 9.

<sup>71</sup> “Europe, War and Canada” MS, page 1, ALF, Box 20 File 195.

<sup>72</sup> For a study of Lothian’s views on appeasement and foreign affairs more generally, and with references to his close political relationship with Philip Conwell-Evans (who personally arranged a meeting between Lothian and Hitler in January 1935), see David P. Billington, *Lothian: Philip Kerr and the Quest for World Order* (Westport, CN: Praeger Security International, 2006).

<sup>73</sup> In his memoir, Lower states only that Lothian made “two points” to him: “first, ‘Europe at the moment [1933] is a madhouse’, and second, ‘Winston Churchill prays every night, “Thank God for the French Army”’ [sic].” Lower, *My First Seventy-Five Years*, 188.

<sup>74</sup> Although some of his lost papers were eventually returned, this incident left a bitter taste in Lower’s mouth that lingered for months afterward. In January of the following year, he even wrote the Latvian correspondent for *The Times* of London asking, “I wonder if it would be worth my while making myself nasty and writing to the Times describing the experience.” AL to R.O. Urch, January 15, 1934, AFL Box 1 File 5.

suggestion that the Germans should be given some territory outside their home frontiers, to administer and develop.”<sup>75</sup>

Bewildering as it might seem in hindsight, the redistribution of territory was not a radical proposition during the 1930s. Indeed, isolationists and internationalists alike proposed it as a peaceful solution for the material struggle between “have” and “have-not” powers.<sup>76</sup> For his part, though, Lower held to the idea for the whole of the decade, sporadically reasserting even during the Italian invasion of Ethiopia and the German conquest of Czechoslovakia.

Lower’s reassuring picture of Germany was based on more than his single, pleasant experience in Königsberg, and indeed, on more than his dedication to promoting a policy of isolation for Canada (a task which required denying that participation wars overseas was either necessary or morally justified).<sup>77</sup> Beyond all this, Lower saw something in the new Germany that he could fundamentally relate to, a disturbing fact made clear in the language he used to describe it. In the article that his University of Manitoba address was converted into, Lower wrote that the “chief concern” of German people was not war, but “the rehabilitation of their own nation; their

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<sup>75</sup> R.W. Bullard to AL, August 24, 1933, ALF Box 1 File 5.

<sup>76</sup> For two of the more notable works of the decade promoting variations of the “have” versus “have-not” dichotomy, see John Foster Dulles, *War, Peace and Change* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1939), there “static” and “dynamic” nations, and E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919-1939* (London: Macmillan, 1939), there “privileged” and “under-privileged” powers.

<sup>77</sup> Another influence for Lower’s friendly perspective on Germany lay closer to home. In November of 1933, several months after returning to Winnipeg, Lower extended an invitation to Henrich Seelheim, the German Consul in the city, to visit his house on the evening of the 22<sup>nd</sup>. The Consul graciously replied that he “would be glad to attend your next meeting.” Dr. H. Seelheim to AL, November 21, 1933, AFL Box 1 File 5. The archival record of this peculiar event starts and ends abruptly there, but the phrase “next meeting,” suggests that the invitation was for one of the private supper-discussion groups Lower participated in. The most likely candidates are either the “History Club” or the “National Club,” both of which J.W. Pickersgill notes were held in their members’ houses and featured regular speakers. J.W. Pickersgill, *Seeing Canada Whole: A Memoir* (Markham, ON: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1994), 116-17. Seelheim himself was an enthusiastic promotor of Nazi ideology among the large German-born population in Winnipeg, and was known to also speak before anglophone Canadian groups as mainstream as the Lions Club. Jonathan Wagner, *Brothers Beyond the Sea: National Socialism in Canada* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1982), 37-41. Perhaps as a useful contrast to Seelheim, only a few months later Lower extended another personal invitation to speak before the National Club to Jacob Penner, the first Communist Party-member elected to the Winnipeg City Council. AL to Jacob Penner, [undated, but written in January 1934], AFL Box 1 File 6.

thoughts are turned inward.” The Germans he met spoke not of reconquering Lorraine or the Polish Corridor, but simply of “having their self-respect restored and that is what they esteem Hitler to have done for them.”<sup>78</sup> In the portion of the speech on which those lines were based, Lower made the point even clearer. The German people “are not imperialistic but are intensely intent on restoring their self-respect and on creating of themselves a real nation, not a congeries of states, as even before the war, they in some respects were.”<sup>79</sup> This rhetoric of nation building and national self-respect should ring very familiar to readers of Lower’s work. These were terms drawn from the same nationalist vocabulary that he used to describe his vision for Canada.

This is not to say that Arthur Lower was either a Nazi or a fascist politically. Lower’s dedication to civil libertarianism was as sincere as his nationalism itself. Indeed, much like his isolationism (but lasting much longer as an element of his thought), the principles of free speech and freedom of the press were inseparable from his ideal for a self-respecting Canadian society.<sup>80</sup> Blunt totalitarianism – whether foreign or Canadian – was anathema to Lower, and hostility to it grew within him as the decade dragged on.<sup>81</sup> Additionally, that he used the same nationalist language to describe Germany as he did for Canada could easily be attributed to necessity; after all, only by a wild stretch of the imagination could National Socialism not be defined in

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<sup>78</sup> Lower, “Europe, War and Canada,” *Manitoba Arts Quarterly*, 16.

<sup>79</sup> Lower, “Europe, War and Canada,” MS, page 7, AFL Box 20 File 195.

<sup>80</sup> This impulse was so strong it could come through simultaneously as he was defending the reputation of Nazi Germany. In April of 1934, Lower came to the defense of a fellow anti-interventionist – T.W. MacDermot, national secretary of the League of Nations Society in Canada – who was denounced by the Canadian Radio Commission after mentioning in a broadcast that participation in another European war would lead to civil war in Canada (a belief that Lower firmly agreed with). Writing to the Chairman of the Commission, Lower urged the regulatory agency to supply the Canadian public with “untrammelled discussion and unprejudiced news and keep their own personality out of the matter... Otherwise, the best thing to do is to turn our radio off, for radio censorship is a national menace.” AL to Hector Charlesworth, April 4, 1934, ALF Box 1 File 6.

<sup>81</sup> Although Lower once confided that he felt a “sneaking admiration” for the “frankly fascist” young writers of *La Nation*, a “well and fearlessly written” Quebec nationalist newspaper with a racist and anti-Semitic bent, this was an outlier in his overall negative reaction to the fascist and separatist movements of French Canada. After the passage of Quebec’s “Padlock Law” for suppressing the speech of communists in 1937, Lower began to take a strong public stand against the danger of home grown totalitarianism in Canada. AL to William Arthur Deacon, April 29, 1936, ALF Box 20 File 196.

“nationalist” terms.<sup>82</sup> And in the end, Lower appropriately admitted that the Germany of 1933 was not the Germany of 1938, 1939, or 1940, the country which he would look upon with the deepest, most existential fear of his entire life.

The point remains, however, that Arthur Lower had a largely positive (and even sympathetic) mental image of Germany during the same critical period when he first developed his isolationist ideology. The meaning of this is of paramount importance; what drove Lower to isolationism was not a fear of war being brought to Canada by “aggressor” states, but the danger of war through Canada’s connections to Britain and (to a lesser extent) the League of Nations.<sup>83</sup>

That Lower omitted some of these embarrassing facts from his own record of events is certainly understandable. But to grasp his ideological development in full – how he came to isolationism and how he eventually left it – all the elements which contributed to shaping his worldview must be explored. Likewise, for the fullest understanding of how Lower chose to express that worldview, the personal events which preceded it must be part of a conscientious reader’s perspective. As this was true for Lower’s writing and speaking at the start of 1934, the same principle applies to Lower’s accelerated advocacy for isolationism at the year’s end.

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<sup>82</sup> Lower was certainly not alone in seeing Hitler as interested more in German national development than war. Even later in the decade, none other than Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King, summarizing his personal meeting with the *Führer* in June of 1937, wrote that “Hitler impressed me as a man of deep sincerity and a genuine patriot.” King recalled with total credulity how Hitler, speaking “with great calmness, moderation, and logically and in a convincing manner,” claimed that German rearmament was not preparation for aggressive war, but simply “to preserve the respect of her people in their own eyes.” W.L.M. King, “Memorandum on a talk with German leaders held June 29, 1937,” in *The In-Between Time: Canadian External Policy in the 1930s*, Robert Bothwell and Norman Hillmer, ed.s, (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1975), 159, 161.

<sup>83</sup> Indeed, as Lower assured Canadians of the resurgent Germany’s benign nature, he simultaneously continued his promotion of “a policy very close to isolation” from both Britain and the “leaky tub” that was the League. Lower, “Europe, War and Canada,” *Manitoba Arts Quarterly*, 17.

## A Wave Forms, 1934

During the summer of 1934 – just over one year before Mackenzie King famously declared after his return to the Prime Ministry that Canada would follow the metaphorical “American road” – Lower took to that road in reality. Together with his wife Evelyn and his Wesley colleague Jack Pickersgill, the trio set off on a road trip of over 4000 miles through the Midwestern, Southern, Mid-Atlantic, and Great Lakes regions of the United States. It was Lower’s most extended time in the U.S. since his Harvard years, one that gave him a grand panorama of contemporary American life amidst the Great Depression and the New Deal. As part of their return trip, the group also stopped in Montreal for the first national meeting of the CIIA, an event that opened the way to another American connection for Lower. At the conference, Columbia University Professor James Shotwell announced the inauguration of a monumental new book series on Canadian-American relations funded by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.<sup>84</sup> Lower would be one of the fortunate Canadian scholars to receive a contract for one of the books in the series, a study of the cross-border timber trade.<sup>85</sup>

The summer of 1934 was also the first instance when Lower’s isolationism was seriously challenged in public. His *Nineteenth Century* article of the previous September belatedly sparked an international scholars’ quarrel between himself, the empire-skeptic and Dominion-nationalist, and British historian Alfred E. Zimmern, a pro-empire internationalist. Zimmern inveighed at length against the main points of Lower’s article as “fallacies,” being especially critical of the Canadian’s call for “peace at any price.”<sup>86</sup> Lower’s reply conceded that a “peace at any price” empire “would not be worth preserving,” but was in the main a reiteration of his original

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<sup>84</sup> Lower, *My First Seventy-Five Years*, 191-92.

<sup>85</sup> Lower, *The North American Assault on the Canadian Forest* (1938).

<sup>86</sup> A.E. Zimmern, “Is There an Empire Foreign Policy?” *International Affairs* 13, No. 3 (May-June 1934), 305.

principles. He contrasted Zimmern's evasiveness with his own confrontation of the realities, "the differences in nature and the divergences of interest" that separated Britain from its Dominions. While admitting that his piece was "written more for Canadian than for English readers," he hoped the latter would duly note the "unsatisfactory nature of colonialism as a basis for Empire." To his "fellow countrymen," he again implored them to recognize that their own interests were no longer synonymous with Britain's. If the empire was to retain Canada as a willing member, it would have to adapt to the reality of Canadian independence. Nothing less than an "alliance between self-respecting States [*sic*]" would be acceptable.<sup>87</sup>

The events illustrated thus far – from the March 1933 *Free Press* letter to the sparring match with Zimmern – were only the prelude for something much bigger to come at the end of 1934; Lower's most brazen assertion of isolationism and nationalism yet. The events of that November were the decisive moment that sealed his reputation as a firebrand promoter of both ideologies for the rest of the decade, dramatically raising his profile and increasing his influence as a political commentator. Combined with his continued participation in the CIIA, the events of November also served to instantly expand Lower's network of likeminded Canadians – fellow nationalists and isolationists whom he read and would be read by in kind.

On November 6<sup>th</sup>, just days before the seventeenth anniversary of Armistice Day, Lower gave the opening talk in Wesley College's annual faculty lecture series, choosing as his topic "Canadian Foreign Policy." By this point, his political predilections were known quantities for those who saw them in print or attended his previous talks on what was becoming his favorite

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<sup>87</sup> A.R.M. Lower, "Is There an Empire Foreign Policy?" letter to the editor in *International Affairs* 13, No. 5 (September-October 1934), 746. Significantly, Lower also repeated his personal doubt that Britain held any kind of moral high ground over other nations, sarcastically asking Zimmern whether he "really believes that the world can be neatly divided into (a) good people, (b) bad people?" *Ibid.*, 747.

non-historical subject. With his habit of speaking his mind frankly, this lecture could never have been anything less than a controversy, and indeed, Lower enthusiastically spoke to stun.

“Canadians,” he began, ought to look out in comfort “from the security of their North American island” onto the “madhouse” that was the outside world. Together with its only neighbor, Canada and the United States occupied “a private world of our own. We are not part of Europe, and European turmoil need not reach us unless we reach out and embrace it.”<sup>88</sup> Despite this enviable geographic position, Canadian external affairs were complicated by membership in two vast and unwieldy world organizations, the League of Nations and the British Empire.

Lower sympathized with the League in principle, casually admitting, “everyone knows that another world war would be just about the end... if it is to be averted, the people most concerned in averting it must get together and act together.” Yet those “people,” meaning the two greatest powers of Europe, Britain and France, could hardly be trusted to serve the interests of the world when all their exhortations to support the League were so plainly self-serving. Lower suggested there was “an uncomfortable element of truth” to the “legend of Anglo-Saxon hypocrisy,” that it was conspicuous for a nation like Britain to cry out for world peace when it was it was the party that had gained the most of all from war (and thus, had the most to lose from it). In the end, there was only one question that Canadians need ask regarding the League, that “hotbed of intrigue carried on by the wickedest men on earth... ‘What is there in it for us?’”<sup>89</sup>

Lower begged the same question regarding Canada’s relationship with the British Empire and even with Great Britain itself, “the one partner in the empire above all others which is likely

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<sup>88</sup> “A Canadian Foreign Policy, Wesley College Lecture, November 6, 1934,” MS, page 1, 5, ALF Box 20 File 191.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 6, 13. In a stricken (but telling) line from the same section on the League, Lower planned to ask his audience to “appreciate something of the attitude of the defeated nations, especially Germany.” He did, however, remind them that Canada, too, had been pressured “on more than one occasion to accept under them [inter-national judicial settlements] the loss of territory that we had claimed to be part of our own country.” Ibid., 8-9.



to get into trouble.” The appealing promise of “protection” from aggression which Britain afforded to the rest of its empire was an “illusory” one for Canada. Only one nation – the United States – could ever threaten Canada militarily, and if it did (an unlikely possibility but one Lower raised for his bigger point), “Great Britain could not help us and probably would not do so.” In terms of trade and defense alike, British imperial policy was always tailored “to serve British interests and not Canadian,” a truth to which English Canadians especially were blinded by the stagnant haze of “sentiment, a smoke screen which has hitherto blurred our sense of reality to these things.” Lower cut through the fog with a hard question; were Canadians prepared to “pay the price of empire,” a cost which meant, at the very cheapest, the debt and death of “the last war,” and at the dearest, to “split this country from end to end, perhaps in civil war.”<sup>90</sup>

Lower answered that question himself. To the “large political entity known as the British Empire” he “could be prepared to be loyal,” but loyalty to England itself was a different matter. That was a “loyalty of one people to another,” something not “consistent with [national] self-respect.” Though “I should always have a due regard for England, the motherland, I am not prepared in any sense to be loyal to England, and I should not think very highly of myself if I were. My loyalty is to Canada.”<sup>91</sup>

This line was the crescendo of Lower’s speech, the moment at which his audience reacted with “a pindrop silence.”<sup>92</sup> That silence, however, was soon broken. The fallout from the speech reverberated first through the pages of Winnipeg’s local newspapers. Lower could count on firm support from liberal *Free Press*, owned and edited by fellow CIIA-member J.W. Dafoe.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 23, 25, 28.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>92</sup> Lower, *My First Seventy-Five Years*, 193.

<sup>93</sup> “Urges Dominion Remain Neutral in Event of War,” *Winnipeg Free Press* (November 8, 1934).

Additional letters of sympathy and praise came not only from a smattering of Winnipeg locals, but also from leading isolationists farther afield, including Ottawa lawyer T.S. Ewart (son of the pioneering Canadian nationalist John S. Ewart, whom Lower referenced by name in the lecture), Canada's foremost literary critic William Arthur Deacon, and the virtuoso of academic controversy Frank H. Underhill, already facing his own threats of dismissal from his history professorship at the University of Toronto for remarks as inflammatory as Lower's.<sup>94</sup>

But the counter-point, too, came almost immediately; a roaring tide of criticism that erupted out of the conservative and pro-Empire *Tribune* and continued through the rest of November. The initial editorial condemnation was biting. Ironically, the paper accused the historian of the same spiritual faults that Lower himself decried as rampant in English Canadian society.<sup>95</sup> Lower's foreign policy for Canada was nothing more than "simple materialism," a "selfish" philosophy born out of the "cheap cynicism of the jazz era." The British Empire may not be perfect, but at least it offered "a worthy part" for Canada to play in the world.<sup>96</sup>

The letters to the editor were even less merciful. One doubted Lower's nerve; "If Japan were to be at war with Canada, Professor A. Lower would be the first to say, the Mother Country is compelled to protect us."<sup>97</sup> Another dismissed his reasoning; "How long would our security last and our oceans protect us, if it were not for inclusion in the British Commonwealth of Nations. These very oceans would be our undoing [without the British Navy]."<sup>98</sup> Others bitterly

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<sup>94</sup> These letters, as well as another from Escott Reid, can be found in AFL Box 20 File 193. All four of these men requested copies of the speech, but having only the original, Lower sufficed to wait until the subsequent *Native Sons* article was published in December before sending anything out.

<sup>95</sup> For an example of Lower's virulent critique of materialism and selfishness, including their association with Canada's massive immigration waves before and after the First World War, see A.R.M. Lower, "Our Present Discontents," *Dalhousie Review* 13 (April 1933), 97-108.

<sup>96</sup> "Professor Lower's Address," *Winnipeg Tribune* (November 9, 1934).

<sup>97</sup> [Anonymous], "For England, Home and Duty," *Winnipeg Tribune* (November 10, 1934).

<sup>98</sup> T.R. Deacon, "Great Britain and Canada's Security," *Winnipeg Tribune* (November 10, 1934).

attacked him in the most personal ways; “[There have always been] traitors to honor, to decency, to manhood, so naturally their line of action is falsehood, and slander... If Canada were attacked tomorrow they would dig up some other excuse to hang an objection on for not fighting for Canada; they would retire; not into their beds, but under them.”<sup>99</sup>

More critical letters and phone calls flowed into the offices of Wesley College, some demanding that Lower be censored or dismissed from his post. These dangers were only canceled by a strongly worded public letter of support from Wesley’s Principle, J.H. Riddell. Dr. Riddell echoed his argument in defense of Lower’s *Free Press* letter from the previous year. The function of education was to grapple with the “problems of life,” a sacred task that could only be fulfilled in an environment of “frank and candid thinking.” The “suppression of frank, fair thought” not only detracted from that noble purpose, its only end was “mental slavery.” No “thoughtful citizen” would even consider denying Lower “the right to express his views” on such “matters of vital importance to the welfare of our beloved country.”<sup>100</sup>

Thus passed the worst of the storm, but Lower still would not let the controversy die. In late November, he returned to the battlefield for a preplanned radio address to be broadcast with two others by colleagues from the CIIA Winnipeg branch: the pro-Britain imperialist Marcus Hyman, and Lower’s personal friend E.J. Tarr, a pro-League internationalist.<sup>101</sup> Still chafing from the *Tribune* assault, he ensured that his broadcast was a strident reassertion of the points of his first speech.<sup>102</sup> For a supplementary “rebuttal” broadcast the following month, Lower once

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<sup>99</sup> J.M. Simpson, “Re Canada and Canadians,” *Winnipeg Tribune* (November 30, 1934).

<sup>100</sup> J.H. Riddell, “Colleges and Free Discussion,” *Winnipeg Free Press* (November 24, 1934).

<sup>101</sup> The original title of Lower’s address, announced early in November before the outbreak of the controversy, was, characteristically enough, “The Isolationist Policy.” “J.W. Dafoe Will Start Radio Series,” *The Manitoban* (November 9, 1934). For the actual broadcast on November 25, though, Lower changed the title to the even more assertive, “A Case for Isolation.” “Isolation Is Discussed By Prof. A. Lower,” *The Manitoban* (November 27, 1934).

<sup>102</sup> Lower wrote to a friend shortly after the radio address went out; “The Tory paper here [the *Tribune*] had been particularly nasty to me in an editorial of a personal nature. I have just finished broadcasting the same thing in short

more reiterated his Wesley arguments while firing new volleys at Tarr and Hyman. He sneered at the “righteousness” of the League. The only “ethical” end for a Canadian foreign policy was to set an ethical example at home; “let us get on with our own job, and mind our own business.” Europe may be in a “perpetual state of catching fire,” but Canada was no fireman.<sup>103</sup> As for Britain, Lower went even farther than he had at Wesley. If that connection meant fighting battles that were not Canada’s own, then “Canada’s foreign policy must be independent and have no connection with British foreign policy.” Again, he posed his provocative question – “Are they [Canadians with imperial sympathies] loyal to England and her Empire or are they loyal to Canada?” – and his even more provocative answer, “I have a proper filial affection for its [England’s] institutions and culture... But my loyalty lies to my own country, not to England.”<sup>104</sup>

Because even this was not enough, Lower ensured that all his public remarks gained additional notoriety by merging them together into an article for the monthly broadsheet of the “The Native Sons of Canada,” a nationalist group he spoke before earlier in the year and would keep a close connection with through the 1930s.<sup>105</sup> In a comparatively moderate tone – he prefaced the piece with a blatantly contradictory disclaimer, “I am not very fond of the word ‘isolation’” – Lower once more reiterated his isolationist talking points. But as well, he gave a clearer statement than ever before of his mentality at the deepest level.

Hitherto, Canadians have taken the Empire as they have taken their religious faith, as something to be believed in, not thought about. But that attitude will not get us very far

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form at the invitation of the Canadian Institute of International Affairs, so I suppose it [the controversy] will go farther still.” AL to Howard [Green], November 25, 1934, ALF Box 1 File 6.

<sup>103</sup> “Canadian Foreign Policy. 10 Minute Rebuttal Broadcast, Sunday, December 9, 1934, CJRC Winnipeg,” MS, page 5, ALF Box 20 File 118.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 2. To make the contrast between his nationalism and his opponents’ imperialism even more stark, Lower compared believers in the latter to “the Irishman who came up to a crowd of men” and asked “‘Is there a fight going on around here?’... ‘if so, can I get into it?’” Ibid., 3.

<sup>105</sup> “A Programme For Canadian Nationalism – Native Sons Address, March 5, 1934” MS, AFL Box 20 File 190.

and I see no reason for regarding Canada's relations with the Empire as a sort of ark of the covenant, to touch which is death.

My suggestions may appear somewhat hard, not sufficiently effused with generous sentiments and so on, but I can assure you that the only reason for which I make them, the sentiment which most genuinely does inspire them, is a profound consideration for the welfare of my own country. I do not know whether my fellow Canadians will consider that that motive is sinful. Some of them apparently do. I myself do not. I myself believe in that good doctrine which the poet proclaims:

'To thine own self be true, Thou cannot then be false to any man.'<sup>106</sup>

Arthur Lower could feign that he was not really a social "sinner," and even that he was not technically an "isolationist" at all, but his general attitude through this incident, what came before, and what was still to come, show that he relished just those roles. He was a willful iconoclast, a deliberate and defiant apostate from the reigning orthodoxy of his people and his country. In hindsight, at least, he admitted as much:

[T]o many people my own views were 'seditious'... I also sinned against the light in writing down ancestral ties... I committed that sin consciously and purposely, for my object was to educate the Canadian public, in so far as that colossal (and ludicrous?) feat was possible, although I knew, and I suppose it was foolish of me, that I was offering myself as a sacrifice in the process.<sup>107</sup>

So Lower sinned on into the uncertain decade. After this, the most precarious moment of his professional career, he wrote, "I uttered my blasphemies with nothing more than threatening growls from dark corners."<sup>108</sup> But this was not to last forever. Grave events were fast approaching that would do more to challenge his isolationism than any malicious letters ever could. And after them would come the day of reckoning, the time when he would be forced to choose between his isolationist vision for Canada, or the reality.

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<sup>106</sup> A.R.M. Lower, "Says Canada's Foreign Policy Should Keep Her Free of Entanglements," *The Native Son* 4, no. 1 (December 1934), 1, 9.

<sup>107</sup> Lower, *My First Seventy-Five Years*, 199-200.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ARTHUR LOWER: REDEMPTION

#### Foreword

Despite some awkward misgivings about the label (preferring instead to define himself in realist or nationalist terms), by 1935, Arthur Lower had inextricably associated himself with the Canadian isolationist school of thought.<sup>1</sup> In turn, isolationism as a foreign policy and as an outlook on world affairs now moved to the very center of his national vision for Canada.

In a January letter to CHIA-director Escott Reid commenting on the latest Institute report circulated amongst its branches, Lower took an immediate interest in the section on “the isolationist point of view” for Canadian external affairs. After claiming initially that the section “put some of our positions fairly,” he quickly moved to criticize its overall “defeatist attitude.” The notions that without British preferential trade Canada risked being “absorbed” by the United States and that another European war would harm Canada whether it was a belligerent or not were particularly hollow. He dismissed both ideas out of hand; they were contradictory to the premise of his entire worldview as an isolationist, and for that matter, as a nationalist:

My position in respect to Canadian foreign policy predicates a self-reliant people. If we have not got that we have got nothing, and I personally would cease to be interested in political questions and would not care very much as to what our eventual fate was... I admit that the British connection is valuable and will be valuable for some time... but the day must come sooner or later when we must stand on our own feet, and I suppose it will come when we become homogeneous enough to do so.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lower summarized his perspective at the start of the year with a dense but characteristic metaphor. “I rather object to people labeling me as an isolationist, though I suppose my views invite the description. But my real point is in respect to attitude... My plea is that we shall become ‘hard-boiled’... I don’t mean that we should become Machiavellian, of course: we should be honest business men, but still business men, and remember that we are dealing with very hard-headed business men, who most definitely are not a new type of evangelist.” AL to T.W.L. MacDermot, January 6, 1935, ALF Box 12 File 15.

<sup>2</sup> AL to Escott Reid, January 23, 1935, ALF Box 1 File 7. This letter was meaningful enough to Lower that he paraphrased its main points for his memoir, omitting, though, that his criticism of the document lay mostly in its

As he made this impassioned statement, Lower must have suspected that his countrymen might not reply to his satisfaction. Yet he wrote it nevertheless. The significance of the outburst is not that it was yet another dire notice to Canada. There was no prediction that blindly following the British would lead to the country's destruction, a point he made often in his later public statements. Rather, these lines were a threat Lower made to himself. If Canadians could not hold their own in the world, if they could not place their own nation's interests before Britain's and insisted on maintaining an antiquated and undignified colonial obligation, if they failed to stand for themselves as a people – in sum, if they failed him – then their nationhood would be unfulfilled, and Canada would no longer be a worthy object of Arthur Lower's faith.

The irony of this grim attitude becomes palpable in the letter's second-to-last paragraph. Lower glibly derided one of the report's alternatives to an isolationist foreign policy – that Canada should respectfully follow Britain's leadership in foreign affairs, but also attempt to influence British policy in directions beneficial to Canada – as “merely imperialism.” Those foolish enough to preach it, he warned, should realize the inescapable consequences of such a Britain first policy; “If you back their note you reasonably expect to have to pay up.”<sup>3</sup>

A potent argument, to be sure, and one he had used just three months prior during his bombshell November lecture at Wesley College. But this was a principle that cut both ways. Lower had a note of his own outstanding – his isolationism – and eventually he, too, would have to “pay up.” At the moment of decision in 1939, the choice would be his: to abandon his faith in Canada, or to renounce his isolationist dogma for another national path.

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section for isolationism, as well as his threat to drop Canada as nation if it failed to follow his ideal path. Arthur Lower, *My First Seventy-Five Years* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1967), 195-96.

<sup>3</sup> AL to Escott Reid, January 23, 1935, ALF Box 1 File 7.

### **The Wave Crests, 1935-1937**

The middle years of the 1930s were the high-water mark of Arthur Lower's isolationism. He promoted his worldview with a steady, aggressive beat, firing off one polemical article after another and supplementing his writing with lectures, talks at conferences, radio addresses, and fierce debates that pitted him against both his pro-Empire and pro-League counterparts at once. The mid-1930s were also the maturing period for Lower's network of isolationist-nationalist Canadians. Together with his articles and speaking events, Lower also carried on an intensive correspondence, one in which he often revealed more of his worldview than he let on in public.

Just as his profile began to rise, Lower very deliberately reached out to one Canadian isolationist specifically: Henri Bourassa, Quebec's elder statesman and the *doyen* of French Canadian nationalism since the turn of the twentieth century. A stalwart opponent of Canadian involvement in foreign conflicts since the Boer War and one of the loudest voices against Conscription during the First World War, Bourassa took an adamantly anti-interventionist stand during the 1930s that Lower identified with. The connection Lower briefly made with this likeminded man in 1935 well illustrates the parallel between one English Canadian's personal strain of the ideology and the far more widespread isolationism of interwar French Canada.<sup>4</sup>

Complimenting the Independent MP on a recent speech in Parliament, Lower took the initiative to send Bourassa a copy of his *Native Sons* article from the previous December and politely ask for his comments. Bourassa complied, agreeing with Lower's views and remarking, "your arguments are similar to those I have propounded, in the last thirty-five years, against all

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<sup>4</sup> Lower was one of a handful of English Canadians – particularly concentrated among members of the Department of External Affairs, like O.D. Skelton – whose individual isolationisms were noticeably similar to the French Canadian variety. See P.B. Waite, "French Canadian Isolationism and English Canada: An Elliptical Foreign Policy, 1935-1939," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 18, No. 2 (Summer 1983), 111-43.



attempts (but too successful) to drag Canada into Imperial ventures.” It was, he wrote, “the solace of my old age” to see those ideas repeated once more “by a new generation. Let us hope that the reaction will be strong and lasting enough to save us from further war adventures – and final ruin or suicide.”<sup>5</sup>

Less illustrious than Bourassa (but a far more frequent correspondent) was William Arthur Deacon, literary editor of the Toronto *Mail and Empire* and another member of that “new generation” of Canadian anti-interventionists. Along with T.S. Ewart, Deacon became one of Lower’s closest intellectual confidants in the aftermath of the furor at Wesley, earning the historian’s trust with a strong showing of sympathy and support.<sup>6</sup> As fellow isolationists and enthusiastic Canadian nationalists, Lower relied on these two men as valuable sounding boards for shoring up his ideas on those conjoined ideological fronts.<sup>7</sup> Deacon lent him an especially understanding ear, and copious comments in his letters of reply. He was thus privy to some of Lower’s more ambitious ideas of the mid-1930s.

Lower confided to the critic that the response to his Wesley speech bolstered rather than discouraged him; he shared Deacon’s confidence that “the nationalist movement is growing in Canada.” He was “equally certain,” though, “that the old Imperialist school in England is playing its game again and would like to have us all nicely tied up in advance.” This danger demanded a vigorous response, one potentially in the offing already. N.T. Carey, President of the Winnipeg

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<sup>5</sup> AL to Henri Bourassa, February 4, 1935, ALF Box 12 File 15. Henri Bourassa to AL, February 19, 1935, ALF Box 7 File 6.

<sup>6</sup> Deacon personally wrote Wesley Principal J.H. Riddell to congratulate him on backing Lower and defending the principle of free speech. William Arthur Deacon to J.H. Riddell, December 3, 1934, ALF Box 20 File 193.

<sup>7</sup> Ewart, ever the lawyer, was adamant that the Statute of Westminster afforded Canada the legal right of neutrality whenever it so chose, and vented his irritation with Canadians who falsely asserted “our liability for Britain, for the British Commonwealth of Nations and the Empire generally.” T.S. Ewart to AL, November 21, 1934, ALF Box 20 File 193. Deacon was more emphatic. “Canada is not going to support Britain in the coming war. Feeling in some sections will be almost as bitter as in civil war...” William Arthur Deacon to AL, December 3, 1934, ALF Box 20 File 193. Emphasis in the original.

branch of the Native Sons of Canada, recently mentioned to him a loose plan “to start some sort of nationalist group here, for study and propaganda.” Lower was clearly struck by this opportunity to organize a genuine force around his most important ideals, but bemoaned the fact that neither he nor Carey had anything close to enough “converts of a sufficient calibre to make it worth while.” The dismal reality, Lower concluded, was that Canada was still “a colonial society,” and indeed, that “we are all colonials, more or less... I for one feel the heavy weight of the culture of other and older lands upon me and would like to have a life of my own, not an imitation of life, as in so many respects it is the fate of a Canadian to have.”<sup>8</sup>

Deacon’s reply was both reassuring and realistic. Boasting to Lower of just how much he was “getting away with here in Tory Toronto... the Holy of Holies... and as a staff member of a Tory, capitalist and imperialist newspaper,” he discouraged any thought of formal organization. That would only create “a target for opposition... Furthermore organization would mean setting a program and definitions; and it is premature. No single mind is fit to plan the new Canada.” Canadian nationalists like Lower and himself were and had to remain “free agents. In a way more effective divided than united.” Deacon reminded Lower that they were already part of a real “movement” with a strong and growing public presence; “just being there and known as holding those general views causes others to think, which is the chief thing of all.”<sup>9</sup>

Lower would eventually return to the dream of an elite nationalist group, but for the moment, he took up Deacon’s strategy of outspoken, individual activism with gusto. Not long after this exchange, he publicly vented the same bitter feelings he confided to Deacon before a large audience organized by the Native Sons. His own copy of the speech does not survive, but

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<sup>8</sup> AL to William Arthur Deacon, January 29, 1935, ALF Box 12 File 15.

<sup>9</sup> William Arthur Deacon to AL, February 18, 1935, ALF Box 12 File 15.

impre-ssions from sympathetic and hostile observers alike attest to its substance. Lower threw down the nationalist gauntlet. The Statute of Westminster had given Canada a legal equality with Britain, but it had not made Canada a true nation, nor Canadians a true people. The *Winnipeg Tribune*, the same paper that condemned him the year before, reported these words as his:

A country does not become a nation by getting something for nothing. A country does not exalt itself by achieving objectives that are unresisted. A nation can only make itself by the sweat of its brow – by embracing noble ideals and suffering the sacrifice necessary to realize them... With our own hands we can make Canada a nation to be proud of, but it cannot be done by other hands. It cannot be done by paper and ink and seals and ribbons at Westminster. It can only be done by the effort we put forth at home.<sup>10</sup>

Lower did not contest this transcript, nor did T.S. Ewart and N.T. Carey in their letters of support in the *Free Press*.<sup>11</sup> They could not. The spirit of the excerpt was unmistakably Lower's; that people make nations, that nations are born, that nations must possess a defining vision of themselves which they assert regardless of the cost. Whether Lower's speech included an explicit appeal for isolationism is not clear, but the following month, he showed Canadians their very limited options for a national path and the only one worth struggling for.

Writing for *Dalhousie Review*, Lower observed with satisfaction that Canada, still in its national "youth," was finally moving "beyond the stage of colonialism" and recognizing "its own essential nature" as a North American nation. This logical conclusion, however, was not uncontested. The old "imperial" mentality remained a powerful force in Canadian public opinion, while others saw the League of Nations as a noble experiment worth Canada's fullest dedication.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> "The Making of a Nation," *Winnipeg Tribune* (March 30, 1935).

<sup>11</sup> N.T. Carey, "The Relation of Canada to Great Britain," *Winnipeg Free Press* (April 27, 1935). T.S. Ewart, "The Relation of Canada to Great Britain," *Winnipeg Free Press* [Clipping without date. Letter dated June 12, 1935.]

<sup>12</sup> A.R.M. Lower, "Foreign Policy and Canadian Nationalism," *Dalhousie Review* 15 (April 1935), reprinted in *History and Myth: Arthur Lower and the Making of Canadian Nationalism*. Edited by Welf H. Heick (University of British Columbia Press, 1975), 304.

These were both untenable positions. At the mildest, one meant the surrender of Canadian sovereignty to rule from Geneva, and the other, a “partial life” of self-subordination as the “dog” to a British “master.” The third way, the “nationalist” way, was Lower’s own, and the application of its principles of self-interest, self-consciousness, and self-reliance offered the best possible answer to the “all important question of war and peace.”<sup>13</sup> “We are not part of Europe,” he declared, repeating verbatim a line he used at Wesley the year before, “and European turmoil need not reach out and embrace us unless we deliberately go out to embrace it.” The choice was thus Canada’s, and to stress the correct path forward – that of the “nationalist school of Canadian foreign policy” – he placed the greatest of emphasis on the domestic consequences of war.<sup>14</sup>

Recalling his own past, Lower insisted that he, like most veterans, was against “another crusade” both on personal and fiscal grounds. But the real dangers posed by war were social and demographic. The divisiveness of war would not only make Canada a less unified country, but the bloodshed itself would also make it a less British nation. Noting ruefully that British Canadians were already “unhappily a bare majority” of the population, he augured that in a future conflict, “they would be the first to go, they would be decimated as they were before, [and] those of them who came back would find their places in many cases taken by the non-Anglo-Saxon.” Pushing his argument to the absolute limit, Lower painted war’s outcome for Canada as nothing short of apocalyptic; it would “probably destroy this country as we know it.”<sup>15</sup>

This article set several important precedents for Lower’s writing. The first was its explicit integration of domestic concerns – specifically, a catastrophic future for Canada if it became

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 306-07. In that same passage, Lower contrasted the English Canadian “dog” with the French Canadian “cat.” He praised the latter for its “disinterested attachment” to the empire, offering loyalty only when convenient.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 309-10.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 308-09.

involved in war – into what was ostensibly a perspective on external affairs.<sup>16</sup> The second was its synthesis of Canadian nationalism and an isolationist foreign policy. This went far beyond the subtle hint given in the title, “Foreign Policy and Canadian Nationalism.” His definition for that “nationalist school of Canadian foreign policy” – “quietly minding [our] own business, conscious that [we have] and need have no quarrel with anyone, giving this tender plant, the Canadian nation, a chance to grow” – made nationalism and isolationism so closely interwoven that they were virtually inseparable.<sup>17</sup>

Lower’s nightmarish vision of war, combined with the infusion of isolationism into the heart of his nationalism, fixed his personal course for the rest of the decade. The first made avoiding conflict an existential necessity, while the second gave his otherwise gloomy perspective a positive and constructive center of gravity. Together, they were the pivotal tenets that kept him dedicated to the cause of non-intervention up to the eve of the Second World War.

The pattern in Lower’s isolationist thought during the first half of 1935 – concentration on Canada itself and its internal development – was decisively broken by a major international crisis later in the year, the Italian-Ethiopian War. A conflict long in the making, Italy invaded the independent African state on October 3<sup>rd</sup>. Canada’s connection to the war became apparent not long afterwards. In early November, a Canadian diplomat at the League of Nations, W.A. Riddell, voiced his support for placing the heaviest economic sanctions – oil, coal, iron and steel – on Italy as an aggressor. Under pressure to act but out of contact with his newly-elected government (Mackenzie King returned in a landslide in mid-October), Riddell’s action was

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<sup>16</sup> Also of note is the rich irony that Lower, still so certain that continental European immigrants undermined Canada’s delicate national balance, was now using their presence to reinforce his argument that involvement in war would shatter Canadian unity.

<sup>17</sup> Lower, “Foreign Policy and Canadian Nationalism,” 310.

quickly misinterpreted as official Canadian policy. Only a public disavowal by King's top aide, Ernest Lapointe, clarified the government's real position. Canadian policy "'has been and will be limited to co-operation in purely financial and economic measures of a pacific character,'" and only those accepted by "'all of the participating countries'" in the League."<sup>18</sup>

In late November, Lower agreed to give a lecture at Wesley on the conflict's background, its course to date, and its potential outcome. He was not the only Canadian observer to address the war at its outset. Just a month prior, four members of the University of Manitoba's student Debating Union butted heads on a provocative but timely motion, "That in the present Italo-Ethiopian conflict, Canada should be prepared to go to war in support of the League." The leader of the opposing side struck an unambiguously isolationist chord, urging his audience to "[c]onsider Canada's geographical position," predicting that the League would be as impotent in Ethiopia as it had been in Manchuria, and that as a nation, "Canada can do more towards keeping peace in the world by remaining neutral during European brawls."<sup>19</sup> The opposition won the debate (an unsurprising outcome on a campus already known for anti-war sentiment), but by a telling margin of 44 to 42.<sup>20</sup>

For his talk, Lower focused on putting the war in historical perspective. He also had a clear underlying motive in discouraging his audience from becoming rashly hostile to Italy (and from that, being tempted to favor direct intervention in the conflict). Linking the war to nineteenth-century European colonization and the more recent division of Germany's former

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<sup>18</sup> Quoted in C.P. Stacey, *Canada and the Age of Conflict: A History of Canadian External Policies*, Vol. 2, 1921-1948, *The Mackenzie King Era* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 185. Lapointe's statement was announced on December 1, a full month after Riddell's unilateral action in Geneva. For the full account of the "Riddell Incident," see *ibid.*, 179-187.

<sup>19</sup> Charles Bishop, "Should Canada Fight for the League? – No!" *The Manitoban* (October 29, 1935), 2.

<sup>20</sup> "The Debating Union," *The Manitoban* (October 29, 1935), 4.

colonies, he found the Italians clearly short-changed of their due in African “spoils.” Recent hymns to the “doctrine of humanitarianism” coming from England, meanwhile, belied that country’s own sordid past. Merely following a well-trod path in its attack on Ethiopia, “Italy, too, yearns to share the white man’s burden.”<sup>21</sup>

Lower waited until the following year to address Canada’s own connection to the East African conflict. This would put his isolationist principles to their first wartime test. Both during the war and in its immediate wake, he subtly refined his position on the League of Nations, now the international relationship which posed the greatest risk of war for Canada. Over and over he reiterated his acceptance of Canadian membership. But at the same time, he proposed affixing such stringent qualifications to it that Canadian participation in any “League war” would be effectively impossible.

In a January article for a Winnipeg magazine, Lower affirmed that Canada would stand with the League when it “named the aggressor,” but insisted that it was Canada’s own right to decide what the “reasonable limits” of League measures were and how far it ought to go in upholding them.<sup>22</sup> In the case of the Italian-Ethiopian War, he channeled the position Ernest Lapointe took shortly before the war’s outbreak.<sup>23</sup> Ethiopia as a country “is nothing to Canada,” and might “equally well exist on the moon” as far as Canadian interests were concerned. The

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<sup>21</sup> “Some Implications of the International Crisis, Tuesday Lectures, November 26, 1935,” MS, page 8, 10, ALF Box 20 File 120. Lower drew a merciless historical analogy for illustration: Britain once “amazed the world by suddenly becoming excited about the enslavement of negroes – after two centuries during which she herself had been the chief slave-trading nation – so now, after a century during which she has been by far the most imperialistic of nations, she suddenly dismays her friends by turning and rending her old idols.” Ibid., 9.

<sup>22</sup> A.R.M. Lower, “Canada and the League: How Far Should Canada Go?” *The Country Guide and Nor’West Farmer* 29 (January 1936), 10.

<sup>23</sup> At a September rally for the coming election, Lapointe said, with Mackenzie King by his side, that “in my opinion no interest in Ethiopia, of any nature whatsoever, is worth the life of a single Canadian citizen.” Candidate King shared that sentiment, promising the crowd that “... any Liberal Government will see to it that not a single life is unnecessarily sacrificed in regard to any matter beyond what affects the safeguarding and rights of our own country.” Quoted in Stacey, *Canada and the Age of Conflict* Vol. 2, 180.

burden of enforcing the League's will militarily could only fall on "those member states most interested and closest to the scene of the disturbance."<sup>24</sup> Naturally, this precluded Canadian involvement in any conflicts whatsoever, short of a war between itself and the United States.

An even more subtle clause to Canada's League membership struck a populist tone. Speaking at a conference in August not long after the Ethiopian war had ended, Lower recoiled at any future prospect of Canadian military force being placed "with little reservation at the disposal of the League." It was the responsibility of Canadian statesmen to ensure that "the power of the state is never used abroad except in the interests of the whole people, and in issues in which they are virtually unanimous."<sup>25</sup>

Arthur Lower knew his country when he made this statement. Canadian unity, and even more, Canadian disunity, were hallmarks of his historical work and social critiques in the 1930s and for the full breadth of his career. The idea that Canadian popular opinion – British, French, continental European and otherwise – could ever be "virtually unanimous" on an issue as contentious as war (particularly with the 1917 Conscription Crisis as a very recent memory), was to say that Canada ought never to go to war at all, lest the conflict offend any of its constituent groups. In this respect, at least, Lower's isolationism was aligned with a key premise of Prime Minister Mackenzie King's actual foreign policy for Canada during the 1930s.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Lower, "Canada and the League: How Far Should Canada Go?" 26. Lower further stated that he partially agreed with the policy of "[o]ur Prime Minister," that Canada ought to "give the efforts of the League our blessing, but to follow rather than to lead." This could be an acceptable policy, but only if grounded on a clear qualification, "a resolute determination to remain out of war." Ibid., 27.

<sup>25</sup> A.R.M. Lower, "General and Specific Aspects of Canadian Foreign Policy," in *Canada, the Empire and the League: Lectures Given at the Canadian Institute on Economics and Politics, July 31st to August 14th, 1936* (Toronto: Nelson's, 1936), 147.

<sup>26</sup> Lower's CHIA colleague and fellow non-interventionist Escott Reid noted this fact in a contemporary article of his own, citing the maintenance of Canadian national unity as the cardinal tenet of King's foreign policy. Escott Reid, "Mr. Mackenzie King's Foreign Policy, 1935-36," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 3, No. 1 (January 1937), 86-97. According to J.L. Granatstein, King himself read the article and approved its description,



Only once did Lower show a break with his nominal acceptance of the League. It was also the moment when he revealed the very most of his true position before the Canadian public. As part of a series hosted by the League of Nations Society in Canada, Lower was invited to participate in the second of ten “round table” discussions on world organization and Canada’s role within it. Held in succession from January through March in cities across Canada and broadcast nationally on the radio, the talks featured some of the most prominent Canadian academics, lawyers, professionals and politicians of the day addressing broad range of international topics and dilemmas. The subject of Lower’s January 23<sup>rd</sup> round table, however, was not random, but tailored specifically to his personal worldview. Its title makes the point plain; “A Policy of Isolation for Canada: Is It Practicable? Is It Desirable?”

The frankness of the title also foreshadowed the course of the round table, held in Winnipeg and refereed by a local rabbi, Solomon Frank. The discussion almost immediately escalated into grueling debate pitting Lower against two prominent Winnipeg lawyers: R.F. McWilliams as the advocate for British Empire loyalty, and E.J. Tarr (Lower’s colleague from the CIIA) as the advocate for the League. By participating, he was thus tasked not only with explaining his isolationist foreign policy, but also defending it in real time against two men with views diametrically opposed to his own.

Lower’s explanation of the “‘isolationist school’ of Canadian foreign policy” was a familiar one. A Canadian isolationist was someone who wished to take “full advantage of the country’s geographical position, relying on it to avoid entanglement in political affairs beyond our borders.” Canada, Lower said with conviction, “is a North American country,” and “we stand

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calling it “‘excellent’” in his private diary. “Becoming Difficult: Escott Reid’s Early Years,” *Escott Reid: Diplomat and Scholar*, edited by Greg Donaghy, (Montreal: Montreal-Queen’s University Press, 2004), 11-22.

in no danger from overseas.” He could accept membership in the League, but only on the condition that any action Canada took in that capacity would be of a “limited nature,” not a policy of “general crusading.” As for Britain, it would not do for Canadians to continue following blindly in its footsteps; “we shall have to be courageous and decide on a Canadian policy,” one based first and foremost “in the best interests of Canada.”<sup>27</sup>

Lower had little pause before McWilliams’ and Tarr’s counterattacks. The arguments of the two shared strong similarities despite a rift over the issue of Canadian loyalty to Britain. Both claimed that world “interdependence” was an inescapable reality. Both believed that Canada had a moral responsibility to participate fully in world organization. And both accused Lower and his isolationist policy of the vice of “selfishness,” the same charge that stung him so personally in November 1934 when it burst from the pages of the *Winnipeg Tribune*.<sup>28</sup>

Tarr was particularly insistent on that point; “It seems to me your policy of isolationism is one of unenlightened selfishness and that your better nature is seeking justification for it in a milk and water support of the League.” He was not far off the mark. Lower’s retort revealed just how thin his veneer of support for the League really was and where his true position laid. While efforts for “peace” and the “reign of law” in world affairs were noble ends, Lower wondered aloud whether the League was a noble enough institution to fulfill them. “If it proves in the future that Great Britain and France are only manipulating the League machinery for their own purposes,” he threatened, “I should say that there would not be much choice but to withdraw and

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<sup>27</sup> A.R.M. Lower, Solomon Frank, R.F. McWilliams, and E.J. Tarr, “A Policy of Isolation for Canada: Is it Practicable? Is it Desirable?” *Interdependence* 13 (1936), 13-14, 17. Familiar, too, was Lower’s apprehension about the label. “I am not an extreme isolationist” he insisted just before the sign off, a position he defined at the beginning of the broadcast as the kind of “complete aloofness” from Europe and the world embodied in George Washington’s Farewell Address. *Ibid.*, 13, 22.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

adopt the same logical attitude of isolation which you attribute to the U.S.”<sup>29</sup> His subsequent comment that “[t]he League is what the great powers make of it and about all we Canadians can do is give it our blessing,” served as an implicit answer to that hypothetical.<sup>30</sup>

As for the moral charge of “selfishness,” with a just a slight change of wording, Lower could cheerfully plead no contest. “Of course I stress national self-interest,” he said. Whether in “transactions between nations” or in the “private affairs of individuals,” a “decent regard for your own best interests, not too narrowly conceived, lies at the base of all ordered society. You must make a reasonable balance of the self-regarding and the altruistic.” Hence his calculated support for the League’s economic sanctions but nothing that verged on military action. Such limited cooperation served Canada’s “best interest in the long run” by showing its willingness to engage with other nations while also definitively keeping out of war.<sup>31</sup>

In sharp contrast with Tarr – a friend of Lower’s since his arrival in Winnipeg in 1929 – McWilliams’ tone leaned towards open hostility. “The day of the small isolated nation is over,” he flatly insisted, and “an isolationist policy even if it were practicable would be destructive of much that is best in our Canadian life.” Isolation “deprives a nation of the stimulus of larger views” and “sinks it into the mire of selfishness and self-conceit.” McWilliams even drew an obviously loaded comparison; “The world is suffering today from national egoism gone mad. Heaven preserve us from deliberately choosing to aim at that goal.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 17-18. McWilliams also inverted one of Lower’s own isolationist talking points to suit the interventionist argument. The “new Canadians” drawn from across continental Europe were by no means disinterested observers in potential European conflicts, as Lower so often claimed. On the contrary, McWilliams said, “we can no more expect those people to forget their homelands than we can expect a Scot to forget Bobbie Burns.”

Harsh as those words were, the sharpest tension between Lower and McWilliams arose over a different point, Canada's relationships with Britain and the United States. Lower chided those Canadians like McWilliams who "would readily yield to jingoistic appeals" of British loyalty, people "intoxicated on such well worn phrases as 'an empire on which the sun never sets' and so on." That line of thought would only mean Canada "being dragged into a European war in the wake of the mother country."<sup>33</sup> But McWilliams had an easy counter. The policy of isolation from the British Empire had one logical conclusion, he said, "to cause us to gravitate into the American orbit." Here Lower emphatically disagreed:

There would be a certain tendency in that direction, Mr. McWilliams... but it does not follow that if we make our policy independent of that of Great Britain that we shall immediately become a satellite of the United States. It is only self-reliance that will save us or anyone else. If we have always got to be dependent on some other nation, whether Great Britain or the United States, then our fate is not worth while worrying about. If there is not enough in our national fibre for us to be ourselves independent in our decisions, in our policies and in our national life generally, if we are forever to remain a shadow of some stronger power, a mere imitative people... then I for one lose interest in the game and cease to care what becomes of the Canadian people. Self-reliance is the main thing that makes our experiment in nation-building justifiable.<sup>34</sup>

One year to the day before this exchange, Lower made exactly these points in private. Now they were on the table in full, broadcast out of Winnipeg for any Canadian to hear who could tune in to listen. Coming out as part of a debate with so specific a topic, there could be no ambiguity as to just what was meant by a policy of independence and self-reliance. For all intents and purposes, isolationism and nationalism had assumed a symbiotic relationship in Arthur Lower's thinking. Nationalism was intrinsic to his isolationism because, at root, detachment from Britain in any degree meant moving one step closer to genuine Canadian independence. Likewise, isolationism was the foreign policy of his nationalism because

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 18.

Canada's development could not be fulfilled without it. It was the ultimate expression of detachment from Britain, and thus, the ultimate measure of Canadian nationhood.

Lower's performance earned him a new surge of attention. Brooke Claxton – Montreal lawyer, future Minister of Defense, and a participant in one of the other round tables of the series – called the debate “better than any of the other broadcasts,” although personally his “sympathies were with Edgar Tarr” and he found Lower's self-interested stance on the League “immoral.” Claxton also confided that on his recent visit to Ottawa he found the Department of External Affairs closer to Lower's position than his own; “they are going to play a very safe policy, indeed.”<sup>35</sup> Winnipeg's Italian Consulate also took notice. Having received word from Ottawa that the Consul General, Luigi Petrucci, was “very interested” in the debate, Lower was “cordially” requested to forward him copies of it and the other broadcasts of the series.<sup>36</sup>

Whether Lower followed through on that particular request is not clear, but he promptly sent a transcript to William Arthur Deacon. The critic's response was extremely positive. By the time of his reply, he had already contacted a printer about turning out reproductions at “a rate per 100 that will allow me to circulate this to many friends of our breed of nationalists.”<sup>37</sup> Deacon also received a copy of Lower's article from the previous year, “Foreign Policy and Canadian Nationalism.” He found the piece even more impressive than the debate, declaring it “the clearest and most persuasive statement yet made of ‘our’ position on foreign policy.” Again taking “high-handed action,” he secured support from the owner of the Ontario newspaper *Oakville Record* to

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<sup>35</sup> Brooke Claxton to AL, March 27, 1936, ALF Box 20 File 122. Claxton's private tip is confirmed by a breadth of historians' assessments of the Department. See P.B. Waite, “French Canadian Isolationism and English Canada,” 138, John Herd Thompson and Allen Seager, *Canada, 1922-1939: Decades of Discord* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1986), 314, and Thomas F. Keating, *Canada and World Order: The Multilateralist Tradition in Canadian Foreign Policy* (Don Mills, ON.: Oxford University Press, 2002), 7.

<sup>36</sup> G. Binda to AL, February 26, 1936, ALF Box 20 File 122.

<sup>37</sup> William Arthur Deacon to AL, March 9, 1936, ALF Box 20 File 122. In this letter, Deacon also used the even more telling label, “isolationists of our stripe.”

run off several hundred copies; 250 for distribution to newspapers and 100 set aside for what Deacon called “my select bunch of nationalist friends.”<sup>38</sup> Lower responded with enthusiasm of his own. Before he even contacted the editor of the journal for formal permission, he wrote to Deacon that “you have my full blessing in your plan to spread the gospel. I trust the reprints will reach as wide a circle as possible and only hope that the article will prove as effective as you very kindly say it appears to be to you.”<sup>39</sup>

If this plan did not actually go through in the end, it did nothing to dampen Lower’s relationship with Deacon for the rest of 1936. Nor, for that matter, did Deacon’s continued warnings against a formal organization of nationalists. The idea of a unified nationalist group had lingered in Lower’s mind for over a year by this point. He was not the only one. In June, while he was in Quebec gathering material for an article on the province and its political scene, Lower received a “manifesto” from Dalhousie professor and fellow nationalist-isolationist R.A. Mackay for a group of his own conception. Reading and editing the document “carefully twice,” he returned it with his comments and support for the plan.<sup>40</sup> It was not until several months later (after Mackay’s plan began to lag) that Lower finally ventured an organizing effort of his own.

In late September, just as the fall term at Wesley was ramping up, Lower sent Deacon the first draft of what he hoped would become a “general statement representing the ideas of reasonably likeminded people and circulated to them.” With a target audience of high-profile

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<sup>38</sup> William Arthur Deacon to AL, March 12, 1936, ALF Box 20 File 122. Inevitably, Lower inquired as to just who those “friends” might be when he himself knew so few serious nationalists in Winnipeg. Deacon’s reply made it clear that he referred largely to fellow members of the *Mail and Empire* staff, particularly its news editor Ray Farquharson and prominent columnist John McAree. Deacon also noted Canadians of prominence in other fields, though, including Canada’s most famous living poet Sir Charles Roberts, University of Toronto historian Harold Innis, and Carlton McNaught, an advertising executive and a leading member of the leftist think tank, the League for Social Reconstruction. William Arthur Deacon to AL, March 21, 1936, ALF Box 20 File 122.

<sup>39</sup> AL to William Arthur Deacon, undated, ALF Box 20 File 122. Lower promised in this letter to “send the Dalhousie Review a note,” which he subsequently did on March 16.

<sup>40</sup> AL to R.A. Mackay, June 26, 1936, ALF Box 20 File 196.

nationalists, Lower's basic aim was to bring "a degree of unity to our thinking... clearing up our own ideas and out of it I would expect some writing to come." Almost wistfully, Lower fantasized that if his group "could only start off with half a dozen people" – a core of dedicated men who he named in the letter's postscript – "we might accomplish something."<sup>41</sup>

The two-page "programme" was well fleshed out. Only the name of the group and a title for document remained undecided. The group's broad goal was to "make [Canada's] divergent elements into one society" through "the bond of a common country." Its role in facilitating this would be a "practical and philosophical defense of the principle of nationalism." Beyond this high rhetoric, the "programme" also featured two lists of "general" and "particular" policies numbered by their level of priority. Crucially, the policies at the very top of both these lists were also integral to Lower's isolationism; generally, "A change in loyalties. The old 'loyalty' to Great Britain must disappear... from English-speaking Canada, to be replaced by loyalty to Canada," and particularly, a foreign policy whose "governing" principle was to "preclude any possibility of taking it for granted that we would be in the next British war."<sup>42</sup>

Lower pursued his organizing drive into November – corresponding intensely with Deacon, Ewart, and Mackay as prospective co-leaders, and also with potential supporters – but in the end, it came to nothing.<sup>43</sup> There was no group, no coordinated writing, and no bold moves to

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<sup>41</sup> AL to William Arthur Deacon, September 28, 1936, Box 20 File 196. Besides Deacon and himself, Lower recommended "beginning" with R.A. Mackay, T.S. Ewart, and Frank Underhill. To come he hoped for Professor Eugene Forsey of McGill University, President of the Native Sons of Canada George Smith, and eventually "a Frenchman" who would be their bridge to the other half of Canadian nation.

<sup>42</sup> "Programme," in AL to William Arthur Deacon, September 28, 1936, Box 20 File 196. Perfectly in line with his top priority of detachment from Britain, two of Lower's proposed names for his group were drawn directly from the history of the American Revolution: "Sons of Liberty" and "Committee of Canadian Correspondence." Likewise, under the "particular" policy category, such was the importance of keeping Canada out of war that even his proposal for "a campaign against further immigration" had to take the second position.

<sup>43</sup> David Lenarcic counts Lower's effort as one of several interconnected attempts at organization by key Canadian non-interventionists in late-1936 (the other two by R.A. Mackay and T.S. Ewart). All three floundered on similar rocks: the practical difficulties of organization, insufficient numbers of English Canadians willing to support such a

give Lower that sense of accomplishment and momentum he so craved.<sup>44</sup> Yet even before this experiment petered out, his worldview was already beginning to show signs of change. He was fast coming to grips with just how difficult it would be to realize his nationalist vision. The most formidable obstacle to Canadian nation-building and an isolationist foreign policy alike was not lack of organization, but the very human material Lower was building with, English Canadians.

That Lower was even contemplating such a scheme indicates a rising level of anxiety. He revealed it frankly to Mackay: “We are all cowards, no doubt, horribly afraid of injuring our own interests. One more speech here [in Winnipeg] from me and no doubt I would be nailed, would either have to shut up or go through with it, and going through with it would involve a frontal attack on the Empire connection and advocacy of complete separation.”<sup>45</sup> In the main, though, this angst stemmed from dimming prospects for his own ethnic group. Canadian nationalism was now the undisputed center of Lower’s life, and as illustrated by his nationalist manifesto, isolationism as a foreign policy and a way of seeing the world was at the center of that center. But the hinge of this dual-armed project was the willingness of English Canadians to accept those positions, both of which ran directly counter to their still powerful sentiment for Britain.

This problem weighed heavily on Lower’s mind in the second half of 1936. For his August conference talk addressing foreign policy, he dwelled on the issue at some length. Despite the “unsatisfactory” nature of Canada’s British relationship, there remained “certain elements in the nature of our people... the psychology of the English Canadian” that hindered

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group openly (and no French participants at all), and nagging fears by Lower and Mackay themselves that going too far would put their professorships at risk. In Ewart’s case, a bout of illness at the start of 1937 forced him to abandon his own efforts at a neutrality petition. David Lenarcic, “Where Angels Fear to Tread: Neutralist and Non-Interventionist Sentiment in Inter-War English Canada” (dissertation, York University, 1991), 84-101.

<sup>44</sup> “Our highly intellectualized talk about foreign policy will get us nowhere,” Lower complained to Mackay as his organizing effort flagged, but “[u]ntil a counter-sentiment is developed, there is little hope” of undercutting the still-dominant sentiment for Britain. AL to R.A. Mackay, December 15, 1936, ALF Box 1 File 8.

<sup>45</sup> AL to R.A. Mackay, November 14, 1936, ALF Box 1 File 8.



their ability to alter it. Their “long period of colonial servitude” had “robbed them of their self-reliance,” while a lingering “nostalgic” affection for the mother land made even questioning the relationship almost out of bounds. The end result would only be conflict, and if Canada indeed became involved in war, it would have only itself to blame. “The plain truth of the matter,” he concluded, “is that if we did not keep out it is because we did not want to keep out. It is to be suspected that those who tell us we cannot keep out are those who, because of British or League sympathies, would really want us to go in.”<sup>46</sup>

At the turn of 1937, Lower reformulated his isolationist strategy in response to this critical dilemma. Keeping Canada out of war remained his top priority (even more so now, as tensions between Germany and Britain began a slow but steady rise following the reoccupation of the Rhineland in March 1936 and German-Italian intervention in the Spanish Civil War in July). Likewise, the social repercussions of war remained his greatest fear. But his mechanism for keeping Canada out – the crux of his non-interventionist platform – shifted dramatically. By the start of the new year, his stock phrase that to avoid war Canada had only to “mind its own business” disappeared completely from his writing. So, too, did his use of the term “isolation” to describe his general position. In their place, he substituted a new refrain as a compliment for Canadian neutrality: the build-up of Canada’s own national defenses.

Lower had considered this idea before. It was present in some of his isolationist articles and speeches since 1934, but always in a marginal capacity. By taking center stage, however, such a focus risked undermining two of his main arguments against participation in war – that Canada faced no direct threats from overseas, and that it was already secure by virtue its

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<sup>46</sup> Lower, “General and Specific Aspects of Canadian Foreign Policy,” 152-53.

geography. Lower recognized this inherent danger in his defense plan from the outset of the shift: “I should say that as much as I would like to see this country a nation in its own right with its own services, self-reliant and self-respecting, depending on no one for its defence, defence measures just now will simply put the game into the enemies’ hands, for I cannot imagine a Canadian service man who is not tied body and soul by his afternoon teacups to imperialism and English society.”<sup>47</sup>

Yet by his own admission, his promotion of defense was not necessarily a response to external threats at all. Lower understood that if English Canadians still lacked the self-reliance of an independent people, something would have to be done to instill it in them. This was the original function of his defense scheme. A strategic build-up of Canada’s defenses would certainly make the country safer. But more importantly, having “the sheer ability to defend ourselves” would finally inspire in Canadians the self-confidence they needed to declare their “strict neutrality.” To be effectively neutral, one first had to be able to “defend that neutrality.”<sup>48</sup>

Several of new articles published in April 1937 serve to illustrate Lower’s revised strategy. It was a well-timed burst of writing. In January, the King government announced its new military budget, ratcheting up the spending total from \$23 million in 1936 to \$35 million for the year.<sup>49</sup> In a response before the Canadian Parliament that same month, the outspokenly anti-interventionist social democrat J.S. Woodsworth decried the increase and proposed a resolution that, in the event of war, “Canada should remain strictly neutral regardless of who the

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<sup>47</sup> AL to Paul Martin, November 1, 1936. Quoted in Lower, *My First Seventy-Five Years*, 205.

<sup>48</sup> Lower, “General and Specific Aspects of Canadian Foreign Policy,” 152-53.

<sup>49</sup> Stacey, *Canada and the Age of Conflict* Vol. 2, 200-01. Stacey notes, however, that this increase was much smaller than the military establishment’s original request.

belligerents may be.”<sup>50</sup> Although he was inevitably unsuccessful, the leader of the C.C.F. received a buoyant letter of support from Lower as a momentary political ally. “As things are,” Lower wrote, “we are as a matter of course belligerents and it would require a positive act to make us neutral.” But recovering some of his faded optimism, he smoothly reassumed his personal place in the struggle for Canadian neutrality. “Every debate, speech and article makes the position clearer and if we are given enough time, we may get through.”<sup>51</sup>

Writing for the *University of Toronto Quarterly*, Lower issued his own call for a firm policy of neutrality to keep Canada out of “the next war.” He denied that Canada stood to lose in trade by not going in; its commodities would be in demand regardless of its belligerent status and without a merchant marine it had nothing to lose from seaborne warfare. The argument that Canada itself would inevitably be attacked he dismissed as ridiculous. An actual invasion was impossible. “[T]hose nervous and bellicose persons” who dreaded “a march on the nickel mines at Sudbury or the coal fields of Alberta” were simply living disconnected from the real world.<sup>52</sup>

Canada could be neutral. The only question was, “[d]o we want neutrality?” For too many “Canadians of British descent,” the unfortunate answer was no. Still hamstrung by “the sentimental tie with the motherland,” they were blindly walking towards disaster.<sup>53</sup> Again Lower described the demographic consequences in graphic detail. In the last war, “[t]he vast majority of our forces were of British decent, and it was these that suffered the most.” The next war would be no different; it “would hasten the process by which Canada is becoming less and less a British

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<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Lenarcic, “Where Angels Fear to Tread,” 108. Lenarcic makes clear that this proposal – “[t]he first Parliamentary effort by anti-interventionists” – very quickly “came to naught,” but it did offer Woodsworth a valuable opportunity for back-and-forth discussion with Mackenzie King and Ernest Lapointe on the floor of Parliament. *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>51</sup> Letter from AL to J.S. Woodsworth, January 29, 1937. Quoted in Lenarcic, “Where Angels Fear to Tread,” 120.

<sup>52</sup> A.R.M. Lower, “External Policy and Internal Problems,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 6, No. 3 (April 1937), 334-35.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 335-36.

country, and would thereby destroy one of the principle objectives of those who would be most anxious to take part.”<sup>54</sup> The ““call of the blood”” was no longer a sufficient argument for war. It was a disservice both to British Canadians themselves and to the rest of their countrymen. All Canadians’ allegiance must ultimately “lie in one place and to one object, one’s own country.”<sup>55</sup>

Lower took a different tone in the niche journal *Canadian Defense Quarterly*. He now avoided an explicit call for neutrality and instead stressed Canada’s natural geographic security and a pragmatic policy of coast-focused defense. Lower scorned the “sentimental irrationalities” that blinded Canadians to their distinctly North American existence. Insulated by two oceans and “a medium” to their south “much more difficult to penetrate than water... Canada alone is so *insulated* that it is virtually an island.”<sup>56</sup> But as an “island nation,” Canada ought to plan its security with that fact in mind. “If the future involves us in wars,” the only “logical basis” for Canadian defense was “to create and strengthen our sea and air traditions, [while] neglecting or at least carefully restricting our military traditions.” Such a policy would be fiscally responsible, ensure “the avoidance of the mass sacrifice [in Europe] which the last war entailed,” and best of all, it would give Canadians a much-needed “centre for national spirit to rest upon.”<sup>57</sup>

If these articles indicate anything, it is that Lower’s foreign policy worldview had grown far more complicated than “let us mind our own business.” But with this new flexibility also came startling deviations from his old mindset. All through 1937, His writing was peppered with ominous hints of his future reorientation away from isolationism and towards interventionism.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 330-31.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 336-37.

<sup>56</sup> A.R.M. Lower, “This Island Nation,” *Canadian Defense Quarterly* 14 (April 1937), 306. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 308-10.

In January, even as he sympathized with J.S. Woodsworth in his crusade for Canadian neutrality, he could simultaneously write to another politician that there was indeed “a clear line to be drawn between another ordinary war in which [Britain] is a belligerent and a struggle in which it becomes obvious that she has her back to the wall.” Although in any event he hoped for nothing more than “limited participation,” perhaps, he thought, it would be best to wait “until the character of the struggle declares itself.”<sup>58</sup> Considering recent and prospective events, though, Lower could see the value of that “ordinary war” for Britain’s imperial interests. “If Canada were out of the empire, one could regard them [European events] with detachment,” he wrote to a fellow University of Manitoba professor of history summering in England. The reality, however, was that “as it is, we may one day find ourselves dragged in to fight something that could have been stifled two years ago... Every war avoided is a gain, no doubt, but from many points of view, it would have been better to have gone through with it over Abyssinia.”<sup>59</sup>

Most conspicuous of all was his social commentary at the end of 1937. Even as he held out for neutrality, Lower subtly acknowledged a genuine benefit that war could offer Canada. This was the stark opposite of his perspective just a few months earlier and for the whole five years prior, that war could only rend Canada apart and reduce its British section to minority status. Writing for *Maclean’s*, Canada’s highest circulation native-produced magazine, Lower condemned his country’s reigning “shoddy ideals” of materialism and individualism.<sup>60</sup> What Canada really needed, he wrote, was a “great unifying national purpose.” Crucially, he cited only

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<sup>58</sup> AL to Paul Martin, January 13, 1937, ALF Box 1 File 9.

<sup>59</sup> AL to H.N. Fieldhouse, July 27, 1937, ALF Box 1 File 9.

<sup>60</sup> A.R.M. Lower, “Our Shoddy Ideals,” *Maclean’s* (November 1, 1937), in Heick, ed., *History and Myth*, 142-43. For the article, Lower aired his disgust with the current state Canadian society in blunter than usual terms. “In his more pessimistic moments one is inclined to think that this Canadian people, adolescents as peoples go, is worn out already, spiritually exhausted, without ideals, without valid traditions, without vitality for creation, without even any very evident interest in its own fate.”

one instance when Canada actually had such a thing. “In the war years, we had just that – a creed, something that man could passionately believe in, fight for, and die for.” Although, he qualified, “that was a creed for an emergency, when that emergency passed, so did our fine idealism, gradually filtered away by the steady drip of pessimism.”<sup>61</sup>

Lower knew those feelings all too well. Idealism defined his entry into the Great War, and afterward, bitterness and pessimism shadowed the long march toward his still elusive Canadian national vision. In his *Dalhousie Review* article of 1935, Lower had described his isolationist foreign policy as a “negative and sober” one, but still just the sort “this country needs.”<sup>62</sup> By the end of 1937, that kind of “hard boiled” realism was clearly losing some of its appeal. What Canada needed now was not mere sobriety, but something rather different. “My analysis of the [social] situation is that what we need more than anything is a cause. Even a foolish cause seems better than none...”<sup>63</sup> Lower may not have realized it here, but by this subtle change in his own sentiments, he had already put himself on an inner road to the war mentality.

### **Ebb Tide, 1938-1939**

The last two years of the 1930s were the agonizing conclusion of Arthur Lower’s isolationist career. Under the strain of world events and the increasingly obvious impossibility of Canadian neutrality, his once hardline position gradually eroded away. In its place was left only a faint hope that world war might offer a new route to fulfilling Canada’s national destiny.

Ironically, these two years were also the moment when Lower reaped the scholarly fruit of all his activism to date. As recognition for his prolific and strident writing, his work was given

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 145. It bears noting that “creed” was one of Lower’s prospective titles for his nationalist “programme” of September 1936.

<sup>62</sup> Lower, “Foreign Policy and Canadian Nationalism,” 310.

<sup>63</sup> AL to W.H. Alexander, November 7, 1937, ALF Box 1 File 9. This letter was a reply to a complimentary note regarding Lower’s *Macleans* article.

a leading place in the initial historical record of the interwar Canadian foreign policy debate. In H.F. Angus' *Canada and Her Great Neighbor*, a study Canadian public opinion of the United States compiled for the Carnegie Endowment's series on Canadian-American relations, Lower's *Nineteenth Century* article of September 1933 was cited as a choice example of the North American isolationist perspective.<sup>64</sup> Lower's erstwhile isolationist-nationalist comrade R.A. Mackay was even more generous. In *Canada Looks Abroad*, a CIIA-financed and -published study of Canada's external affairs written with the input of Institute members from across the country (including Lower himself), Mackay cited Lower's August 1936 conference talk at length, using its six-point platform as a model of the foreign policy of "non-intervention."<sup>65</sup> University of Toronto professor F.R. Scott took a similar line. For his book, *Canada Today* (also a CIIA production), Scott referenced more articles written by Lower than any other Canadian author. Tellingly, he also made use of Lower's old stock phrase – that Canada's foreign policy ought to be centered on "minding her own business" – while describing the "non-interventionist or isolationist" section of Canadian opinion.<sup>66</sup>

Lower had little opportunity to enjoy this recognition, though, when everything he had done to earn it had amounted to effectively nothing. Even before 1938, he knew that as the likelihood of another European war rose, the likelihood of Canadian involvement in that war rose in kind. In response, his view of the European situation grew bleaker than ever. His early sympathy for Germany and Italy faded rapidly. The pair were no longer aggrieved nations intent

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<sup>64</sup> *Canada and Her Great Neighbor: Sociological Surveys of Opinions and Attitudes in Canada Concerning the United States*, edited by H.F. Angus, (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1938). For the references to Lower's article, see Chapter 15, "Books and Reviews." Ibid., 341-61.

<sup>65</sup> R.A. Mackay and E.B. Rogers, *Canada Looks Abroad* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1938), 266n1.

<sup>66</sup> F.R. Scott, *Canada Today: A Study of Her National Interests and National Policy* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. [revised and enlarged January 1939, first edition published July 1938] (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1939), 142. For the second edition Scott cited five of Lower's articles total, three of which were pieces on defense written in 1938.

only on readjusting the status quo, but predators threatening both their neighbors and the British Empire.<sup>67</sup> The latter victim, however, he afforded no sympathy. Despite his recognition that Germany and Italy were less benign than he once thought, Lower saw their cold war with Britain as an amoral “international poker game” that Canada need not play a part in.<sup>68</sup>

At the beginning of 1938, Lower continued to push his policies of Canadian self-defense and neutrality. Just as before, nothing abroad threatened Canada, and even in the unlikely event of attack, there was little to fear. By its natural geographic security, and with just a “small expenditure” to shore up its domestic defenses, “Canada could ward off an attack in force by a great power with little injury... even an attack by a great power which had wrested control of the sea from Great Britain.” This was what Lower desperately wanted his countrymen to see before it was too late. Realizing that they could defend themselves was more than just the surest way to keep Canada safe, it was another step they could take towards fulfilling their nationhood. But the next step was even more important. Canada also had the power to choose whether it “wishes to stay out of the next war.” There was now more reason than ever to say no. The “amazing record of the present British government” in East Africa and Spain showed that it was not “to be trusted by people three thousand miles away from it and who are not represented in it.” Ultimately, if “she really is a nation,” Canada must “make her own decision about the next war.”<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> In a radio address on the current state of politics and public opinion in England, Lower said that “[t]he realization is only very slowly dawning [there] that the present veiled conflict is not one of ‘isms’ at all (‘democracy’ or ‘fascism’) but one for power, that the ultimate objective of the fascist nations is not the extension of their fascist doctrine, but the hunting down of the ultimate quarry, that noble beast the British Empire.” “What’s Happening in Other Lands – England, Broadcast, CKY [Winnipeg], Thursday, April 7, 1938,” MS, page 7, ALF Box 20 File 123. Lower took an even harsher line on Japan. In March, he put his own name to a statement circulated by the Winnipeg branch Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom that called on the Canadian government to embargo the “immoral traffic” of war materials to Japan. F. Corrinne Lloyd to AL, March 1938, ALF Box 1 File 10.

<sup>68</sup> A.R. Marsden [pseudonym, A.R.M. Lower], “The European Minuet,” *Winnipeg Free Press* (May 10, 1938).

<sup>69</sup> A.R.M. Lower, “Canada Can Defend Herself,” *Canadian Forum* 17 (January 1938), 343-44. Noteworthy also is the key language recycled from Lower’s “Isolation” debate of January 1936; “all through our history we Canadians have been accustomed to depend on someone else [for our defense] ... Self-dependence is something utterly absent



Such was Lower's last hope for avoiding war and all it entailed. But this was still just wishful thinking. Regardless of British policymakers' missteps, he knew all too well that Britain's emotional sway over the English Canadian public and Canadian national policy virtually guaranteed the Dominion's loyalty in a time of crisis. Exactly what he had feared at the start of 1935 had come to pass; Canada was tightly bound to Britain's next war, whenever it came and whatever shape it came in. Lower confessed his morose perspective to Escott Reid: "It seems quite vain to discuss, say, Canadian neutrality when there is no chance of our even dreaming of maintaining neutrality in a British war... What then can we discuss in the real of Canadian foreign affairs these days? Some purely academic subject? It does not seem to me that these are the times for arm-chair debates. But if the debate is to have reality, one must be prepared to talk something that he will soon hear branded as treason."<sup>70</sup>

The persistence of Canada's self-subordination drove Lower's already intense resentment of Britain to explosive new levels. It helped that his outlook for world affairs at large was sliding deep into a valley of pessimism long before Munich. As early as April, he saw a geopolitical sea change on the near horizon. "It is very hard for me to keep in the remote regions of the academic," he wrote to Canadian-born J.T. Shotwell of Columbia University. "All these things we are doing now will have no meaning within a few years. It seems to me that we are actually witnessing the second world war; it is going on bloodlessly at present but it is being fought none

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from our thinking. But surely no people who value their self-respect can linger on in a dependent position, living on charity, as it were... If we cannot or will not defend ourselves, we deserve the fate that is sure to overtake any people who are willing to accept defeat or conquest."

<sup>70</sup> AL to Escott Reid, September 6, 1938, ALF Box 52 File 21. For his part, Reid was slightly more optimistic. "It seems to me that the Isolationist feeling in Canada is rapidly decreasing but perhaps if we had to make a deliberate decision to enter a war we would be surprised at its latent strength here as in England... no matter what the Imperialists and Communists say in Canada I doubt whether the Canadian farmer or working man is going to rally to the colours with great enthusiasm." Escott Reid to AL, September 8, 1938, ALF Box 42 File 21.

the less... Few people seem to see that a revolution is proceeding under our eyes, a revolution perhaps as significant as the fall of Rome itself.”<sup>71</sup>

Lower would find his hyperbole confirmed by events later in the year, but again, the general thrust of his viewpoint was set prior to the nerve-wracking crisis over Czechoslovakia. In a pseudonymous article published in the September issue of *Canadian Forum*, he assigned the blame for Europe’s unease squarely to Britain. But in the process, he radically reversed some of his own positions from earlier in the decade. By condemning the British for their conciliatory attitude, he implicitly approved the alternative “French formula” to “win” the peace of 1918, the “realistic suppression and destruction of the defeated foe.” He gave similar implicit approval to conditions created by the Treaty of Versailles. Out of the Allies’ supreme triumph could have come “a world bound by rules of law.” But Britain, “the one nation capable of leading the peoples into the promised land... was too weak for the task history had put upon her.” Unable to achieve “dominance” over “a pack of mad men who need never have been permitted to emerge” in the first place, Britain’s policy of appeasement was simply “the last resort of the blackmailed rich man.”<sup>72</sup> This brutal and self-righteous censure had an ulterior motive, though. Lower did not let the opportunity pass to push for a Canadian break with that “essentially unstable and unreliable” British policy. “The future,” he wrote, “is almost certain to bring more and more adherence to an insular and opportunist policy on the part of Great Britain, and to a continental, or North American policy, on the part of Canada.”<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> AL to J.T. Shotwell, April 10, 1938, ALF Box 1 File 10.

<sup>72</sup> A.R. Marsden [pseudonym, A.R.M. Lower], “The British Whirligig,” *Canadian Forum* 17 (September 1938), 171-72. An even more jarring reversal was Lower’s rosy description of the meaning of the First World War. “The war, in so far as it had idealistic objectives, was fought (by the English-speaking peoples at least), to enforce the sanctity of treaties and to break irresponsible and autocratic government down into responsible and democratic.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 173.

The events of late September and early October reinforced and intensified these initial convictions. At the onset of the crisis over the Sudetenland, Lower was at the start of an extended leave-of-absence from Wesley. For the coming academic year, he was to occupy his friend R.A. Mackay's political science professorship at Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia while Mackay served on the Rowell-Sirois Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations. His wife, however, had travelled alone to England in early September to visit her parents in Folkstone, a coastal town on the English Channel. Thus, through the worst of the crisis, Lower was frantically worried not just about the safety of his country but of his own spouse.

"It looks as if we are going to get our war," Lower wrote to one of his closest Wesley colleagues at his personal nadir. "I have little doubt but that Canada would at once come in, though I can feel no such passion as stirred the country before." And just as he had long thought, the meaning of participation in a British war was the negation of his entire nationalist project. "I can see no probability of our acting as a nation," he despaired. "We shall be a colony again, carrying out a superior will. If one shall cease to be exerted upon us, we shall fall under the domination of another, the American. There is no conception of independence in this country, and I am afraid [there] never will be. Our fate is to be either colonials or provincials."<sup>74</sup>

The passing of the "immediate crisis" offered Lower much needed relief, and a valuable moment for reflection. Writing to his wife – now safely out of any potential "line of fire" – he briefly harkened back to his old perspective of 1933 and then abruptly departed from it:

I tried my best to believe that a peace (at almost any price) is better than a war. That is the Chamberlain our savior line. On the other hand, Hitler got rather more (peaceably) at

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<sup>74</sup> AL to David Owen, September 25, 1938, Box 1 File 11. Running through his entire doomsday scenario – "the loss of the Mediterranean," "a showdown in Spain," "wide action by the Japanese navy" and "India bursting into flame" – it was little wonder that he was also "very much worried about Evelyn, in an exposed southern port of embarkation, a natural target for raiding."

last than he demanded. The fact cannot be blinked that England took it full on the chin from Germany, France too. It was a defeat that may well change the face of the world, and Chamberlain was the architect of that defeat... As far as her continuing to be a power in the world, that day it seems is almost over. Nobody would take England or the English government's word very seriously now.<sup>75</sup>

After he wrote these lines, Lower implored his wife not to misinterpret him; "I for one was never at any time for suggesting to the people of England that it was their duty to fight. Certainly I didn't feel that way myself... Perhaps a peaceful old age is best [for England]."<sup>76</sup> But this qualification was only half the reality. It was true that he chided his own sister in Toronto for personally "feeling humiliated" that Britain did not go to war, asking her why she behaved as if it "were your country, which of course it isn't."<sup>77</sup> Yet he clearly laid a heavy moral judgement on Chamberlain and England for conciliating Germany, which even before the crisis he described as a dangerous country that ought to be reined in. Indeed, through the coming months and into the following year, he would cite the events at Munich as further justification for Canadian detachment from Britain. Lower could take these conflicting positions because they both served his ultimate end. Above all, the only country whose involvement in war he had any real stake in was his own, and the only result he really wanted was to keep Canada out.<sup>78</sup>

Lower was not alone in this driving concern, a fact which became more apparent than ever in the months following the Munich Crisis. When Britain stood at the very precipice of war, there was no still no question that Canada stood there with it. Prompted by this near disaster, a small group of Canadians mounted what would become, according to David Lenarcic, "the most

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<sup>75</sup> AL to Evelyn Lower, October 13, 1938, ALF Box 1 File 11.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> AL to Jessie Lower, October 4, 1938, ALF Box 1 File 11.

<sup>78</sup> Lower summarized his explicitly "nationalist" perspective for his sister. "Personally, I prefer Canadian unity at the cost of Czecho-Slovak disuniting [*sic*], rather than civil strife and the possible break-up of the Confederation here in order to secure something for a country in which none of us are really interested... Canadians cannot afford to take high and mighty attitudes towards European questions unless they are prepared to involve their own country in war as the price of their moral indignation." AL to Jessie Lower, October 4, 1938, ALF Box 1 File 11.

ambitious and organized campaign” of Canadian non-interventionists of the entire 1930s.<sup>79</sup> The project was spearheaded by F.R. Scott and CBC Board of Governors-member Alan Plaunt; both socialists, members of the League for Social Reconstruction (a leftist think tank), and close affiliates of the C.C.F. Their “neutrality league” began as a long form letter circulated to potentially sympathetic individuals across English-speaking Canada. Lenarcic notes that the group’s numbers came mainly from “west of Winnipeg” and were largely lawyers and university figures like T.S. Ewart and Arthur Lower. Its ranks also counted many business and professional men, though, as well as a handful of French Canadians and several women.<sup>80</sup>

Through the winter of 1938-39, the correspondence group drafted and signed an official manifesto, “Canadian Unity in War and Peace.” Released to major Canadian newspapers in early March of 1939, it called on Parliament for a “positive assertion of [Canada’s] right to decide upon her belligerency or neutrality,” a demand coordinated with the proposal of an actual “neutrality bill” in February by Jack Thorson, a Liberal M.P. from Manitoba. Crucially, the manifesto’s last paragraph framed the value of such “clarifying legislation” in explicitly nationalist terms: “Canadian control over Canadian war policy would merely complete a century of gradual development of democratic control over all aspects of Canada’s domestic and foreign affairs. This final democratic right is a natural conclusion to her development into a sovereign nation, linked by feelings of sentiment and a common crown to other British people.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> David Lenarcic, “Pragmatism over Principle: The Canadian Neutrality League, 1938-39,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 29, No. 2 (Summer 1994), 1.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>81</sup> “Canadian Unity in War and Peace – A Letter to the Editor Presenting an Issue of Responsible Government,” *Winnipeg Free Press* (March 8, 1939). Besides Scott, Plaunt, Lower and Ewart, among the other seventy signatories of the published manifesto were McGill law professor P.E. Corbett, former head of the League of Nations Society in Canada T.W.L. McDermot, and Violet McNaughton, a prominent Canadian feminist and pacifist.

Despite that last mollifying clause, this was still a proposition Lower could endorse. But while he readily signed the document and helped in its revision, his personal role in what he called “the neutrality drive” – the work of finding signatories for the manifesto – was a smaller one than the other key members of the group.<sup>82</sup> There was an obvious reason for this. From the outset, Lower recognized that his new environment was not a fertile ground for neutrality. The social “atmosphere” of Nova Scotia was so “overwhelmingly Imperialistic, colonial and military” that there was little he could realistically hope to accomplish there.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, after weeks of futile effort, he reported back to a leading organizer in Winnipeg that garnering signatures for neutrality in Halifax was “really equivalent to getting people in this church going community to sign a statement to the effect that there is no God.”<sup>84</sup>

Lower’s skepticism about the project went much farther than “colonial” Halifax, though. His existing doubts about English Canadians’ ability to hold themselves apart from Britain had not disappeared, but had only grown stronger since the Munich war scare.<sup>85</sup> They influenced his important contribution to revising the original manifesto written by F.R. Scott. Writing to Alan Plaunt just over a month into the project, Lower voiced his concerns and issued recommendations accordingly. The statement would easily appeal to those who already favored neutrality, but he doubted “that it would be of much avail to the unconverted. There is a very large body of persons in this country who not only do not wish to remain neutral but also actually

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<sup>82</sup> AL to Jack Pickersgill, January 24, 1939, ALF Box 1 File 13.

<sup>83</sup> AL to F.R. Scott, November 21, 1938, ALF Box 1 File 11.

<sup>84</sup> AL to G.V. Ferguson, February 20, 1939, ALF Box 1 File 11. In the end, Lower’s was the only signature to be had in Halifax, and one of just three total from east of Montreal. Lower, *My First Seventy-Five Years*, 226.

<sup>85</sup> Lower’s resentment of British sentiment was at its most visceral in the immediate wake of Munich: “You have seen I suppose that we are to have the blasted royal family visit Canada next year. That will mean another orgy of belly crawling: the repulsiveness of colonialism will be on full display. One of the smart bits of work pulled off by [Governor-General] Tweedsmuir this last summer. I wish Canadians had some vestiges of self-respect.” AL to Evelyn Lower, October 13, 1938, ALF Box 1 File 11.

wish to fight... Probably nothing can be done with them.” As for the “large body of undecided opinion... I doubt very much if it could be converted to the idea of neutrality put point blanc [*sic*].”<sup>86</sup>

The only viable path forward for Canadian neutrality was not to promote it as an actual foreign policy, but as an “abstract right” clearly tied to Canada’s “complet[ion] of her edifice of responsible government.” Genuine “neutrality legislation” had “not the slightest chance” of passage and was a non-starter in public discourse; “[t]here is no sentiment whatsoever in [English-speaking] Canada, beyond a very small circle, for such an attitude.”<sup>87</sup> Despite this very cautious posture, Lower’s true goal remained the same: keeping Canada out of war. And as before, drawing ordinary Canadians over to the side of neutrality was the prerequisite for success. “[I]f we disguise the thing in innocuous legal language,” Lower confided to Scott, that effect might yet be achieved.<sup>88</sup>

Ultimately, Lower biggest contribution to promoting neutrality in those critical post-Munich months came not through this organization, but through his continued individual activism. Although he did not publish any new foreign policy articles until the following spring, from December 1938 into April 1939, Lower made his voice heard through a remarkable string of radio debates discussing the ongoing hurricane of world events. In all but one of the seven programs – each recorded in Halifax and broadcast nationally by the CBC – Lower shared the air with two prominent Halifax academics: Dalhousie professor of philosophy H.L. Stewart, and A.S. Walker, President of the University of King’s College. As in his 1936 League of Nations

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<sup>86</sup> AL to Alan Plaunt, December 23, 1938, ALF Box 1 File 11.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Arthur Lower to F.R. Scott, December 24, 1938, Alan Plaunt Papers Box 2 Folder 21. Quoted in Lenarcic, “Pragmatism over Principle,” 134.

Society roundtable, each participant took a distinct side on foreign affairs; in Lower's words, "Walker being our imperialist, Stewart our collectivist, and myself the nationalist."<sup>89</sup>

The opening debate on December 11<sup>th</sup> set the tone for the series. Addressing the unresolved dispute over the return of the former German colonies, Lower's policy position for Canada was one of total detachment, but even as a "student of international affairs" he viewed the issue as one of power politics and nothing more. While he favored "international administration" as an ideal settlement, the reigning reality was that "the only people who have a good title to colonies (or anything else) are those that are strong enough to retain them." Although he belittled Walker's "bulldog" mentality of "naked imperialism," Lower agreed with him on one serious point; "if [Britain] and France go on surrendering much more... they are very likely to lose everything."<sup>90</sup> In the next debate, held on New Year's Day 1939, he took the same line. Chamberlain's upcoming visit to Rome could only mean yet another "surrender." Just as he "sold out" the Czechs, he would do so again with French colonies as the next probable sacrifice. The "only satisfactory explanation" Lower saw for British policy to date, "seems to be a desire on the part of the Chamberlain government to have England commit suicide as a world power. Mr. Chamberlain may yet go down as the great undertaker of Empire."<sup>91</sup> By mid-March there was no doubt left. The whole nation of England now stood in disgrace before his eyes. Chamberlain and his policy of appeasement, Lower concluded, "represents well the nervous and almost hysterical people of England, who think no sacrifice too great for peace." Hitler and

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<sup>89</sup> Lower, *My First Seventy-Five Years*, 217.

<sup>90</sup> "CBC National Network, Roundtable Broadcast, December 11, 1938," ALF Box 20 File 131.

<sup>91</sup> "Events in Europe, January 1, 1938," ALF Box 20 File 124.



Mussolini, he grimly predicted, would exploit this fatal weakness to the limit, “forcing concessions indefinitely” until they eventually achieved “something like world domination.”<sup>92</sup>

Brash statements like these can easily be misread. Taken out of their broader context, they suggest that Lower – despite an explicit denial – did want Britain to fight in Europe, even as he knew with certainty that Canada would be dragged in behind it. Thus it bears repeating that through the post-Munich months Lower was still dedicated to keeping Canada out of war. On that basis, he could even show private appreciation for Chamberlain’s appeasement policy while publicly decrying it as an embarrassing “surrender.”<sup>93</sup> At key moments in the debate series, too, he made his preference for Canadian non-involvement totally clear. In late January, he urged Stewart and Walker to consider Canada’s German and Ukrainian populations in the event of a potential British-Russian war against Germany. “You can see that if half a million of our people became decidedly pro-Hitler in their sympathies, that might create a very nasty internal situation for us.”<sup>94</sup> The following month he flaunted his admiration for the “clear sighted” and national interest-based American policy of isolation; “Every nation would choose isolation if it could. I except Canada, many of whose people seem actually to want to get into wars.”<sup>95</sup>

Most revealing of all was his radio lecture in March. Undeterred by the German annexation of the remainder of Czechoslovakia just a few days prior, Lower gave what amounted to a swan song for his isolationist-nationalism. His refrains were familiar ones: a call for a self-

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<sup>92</sup> “The Italian Colonial Question, Broadcast, Sunday, March 12, 1939,” ALF Box 20 File 127.

<sup>93</sup> “There is little doubt in my mind that the country would have been at war last September, much as it was before, so we can thank C[hamberlain] for giving us a breathing spell from that.” AL to N.T. Carey, January 17, 1939, ALF Box 1 File 12. In his reply, Carey aligned with Lower’s mindset perfectly; “Yes, Chamberlain saved us from being engulfed in another European war, and as I see things it’s up to us to take every advantage of the escape... the more we [Canadians] realize the fantastic change in British policy, the easier it will be to convert our people.” N.T. Carey to AL, January 22, 1939, ALF Box 1 File 12.

<sup>94</sup> “Ukraine and the Balance of Power, Broadcast, January 29, 1939,” ALF Box 20 File 125.

<sup>95</sup> “America and Europe, Broadcast, February 19, 1939,” ALF Box 20 File 26.

defense program attuned to Canada's "North American nature," an assurance that "Canada itself" was still "an island" insulated by two oceans and an indomitable southern neighbor, and a demand that Canadians finally choose to take their fate out of British hands and into their own.

Canada is a self-governing nation, and I hope, a self-respecting nation, and must make its own decisions. Canadians find that very difficult to do, for while we are self-governing by law, many of us, perhaps most of us, are still colonials in our own minds; we find it hard to realize that we are indeed responsible for our own actions, and like growing children, hate to face the trials and tasks of adult life, hate to leave the warm parental abode and go off to make our own way. Yet somehow or other we, each and every Canadian, must bring his or her mentality into line with our responsibilities. We all know what happens to the son or daughter who lingers too long in the warm shelter of the family home, leaving all their important decisions to their parents; such children never develop any power of decision of their own, they become mentally inert and feeble of heart: they never really grow up. So with nations. We shall refuse to grow up at our peril. And one of the most necessary aspects of growing up in this troubled age is to have the courage to face a very nasty, hostile, perplexing world for yourself. Hence we Canadians must face the question, what is the national interest of Canada, and be prepared to answer it fearlessly.<sup>96</sup>

Lower rarely exhibited his favorite metaphor – the child-nation – at such prodigious, uninterrupted length. But this passionate outburst concealed an inner sadness. In fact, he had already slid back into the same valley of pessimism he occupied the previous year. Writing to one of his closest friends, Jack Pickersgill (formerly of Wesley College but now in Ottawa as a civil servant in the Department of External Affairs), Lower admitted the total futility of his efforts to date. "What is the use any longer talking about Canadian defense, or Canadian policy, when it is so obvious that as a nation we have neither will or purpose, except to rush in obediently and help the British out of the mess they themselves have gotten into? I have to do a good deal of talking, too, down here, so am getting more and more embarrassed."<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> "The Question of Canadian Defense, Broadcast given over CHNS, March 20, 1939," ALF Box 20 File 128. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>97</sup> AL to Jack Pickersgill, March 21, 1939, ALF Box 1 File 13.

Loath as he was to admit it, he rightly recognized that British sentiment still dominated English-speaking Canada. Indeed, by his pessimistic discounting of immigrants, he actually underestimated its breadth and potency.<sup>98</sup> Lower was now in a dangerous corner. His conviction that Canada's nationhood hinged on Canadians' willingness to stand firmly apart from Britain even in its hour of need, was simply untenable. If war came and Lower still clung to this dogmatic principle, he might be forced to follow through on the terminal threat he made privately in 1935 and publicly in 1936. Ultimately, if Lower was to remain a Canadian nationalist through Canada's next British war, adaptation to the hard realities was necessary.

Such a transition could not (and did not) happen overnight, but the solution lay within those concluding lines of Lower's March radio address. His vision of a "nasty, hostile, perplexing world" was not a contrived rhetorical device. Events abroad during and after Munich deeply troubled him as they never had before. Through the years since 1933, he observed the upheaval in Europe with keen interest, but also with the confidence that it was truly none of Canada's business and if Canadians wanted, they could comfortably remain uninvolved. The phenomenal ascent of Germany – and the corresponding decline of Britain – in late 1938 and early 1939 cracked this wall of confidence beyond repair. Gradually, his decades-old resentment of the one was massively outweighed by his newfound fear of the other.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> John Thompson asserts during the 1920s and 1930s Britain enjoyed a massive popularity spike across Canadian society, even among continental European immigrants, calling it "the apex of Canadian affection for the Crown." John Thompson, "Canada and the 'Third British Empire', 1901-1939," in *Canada and the British Empire*, edited by Phillip Bruckner, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 100-02. In fairness to Lower, though, his colleague F.R. Scott made the same miscalculation. He commented that the full fifth of Canada's population that was neither British nor French could "scarcely feel a sentimental obligation to take part in every British War." When combined with the French, this meant that "fully half" of Canada was "non-interventionist." Scott, *Canada Today*, 136, 146.

<sup>99</sup> A letter presaging his May *Canadian Forum* article illustrates Lower's German anxiety; "it seems impossible that there can be such an explosive force as is modern Germany, in the world for an infinite time without an explosion... a revolutionary period is anyone's opportunity, and if one man doesn't light the match, another probably will." AL to David Owen, April 29, 1939, ALF Box 1 File 13.

An inkling of this came through in a May article for *Canadian Forum*. By no coincidence, it was also Lower's last published plea for a Canadian self-defense program, for a North America-centered foreign policy, and for willful detachment from Britain. If the title of the piece – "Canada and the New World Order" – failed to hint at its thesis, Lower made it brutally clear in the opening paragraphs. Although the day had not yet come, "the crushing series of defeats" Germany had dealt England and France symbolized a geopolitical revolution. "Europe's future," he strongly suggested, would soon "lie under a great Pax Germanica." While he coldly noted that such a system might also mean an "order and efficiency" that Canadian trade could benefit from, the article's concluding paragraph radiated fear of the volcano across the Atlantic.<sup>100</sup>

The only appropriate response to "the new world being born" was to reorient Canada away from Europe and towards its own continent. But in sharp contrast to his articles of the last four years, Lower's domestic nightmare was no longer fixated on Canada's social stability under the strain of another war effort or its racial composition afterwards. Now, and for the first time in the decade, he saw a vague but glaring overseas threat to Canada's national security. Only by "an intelligent appreciation of the nature of that new world," he warned, "shall we be able to keep away from our soil the illiberalism, the oppression, and the ruthless cruelty with which it seems to be associated."<sup>101</sup> Since one of this article's main arguments was that Canada could still be made totally invulnerable to external attack, that ominous final line might have referred only to totalitarianism arising within Canada as a response to the "new world order." This was a fear much on Lower's mind through March and April, as University of Toronto professors Frank

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<sup>100</sup> A.R.M. Lower, "Canada and the New World Order," *Canadian Forum* 19 (May 1939), 44.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

Underhill and George Grube (the latter was also editor of *Canadian Forum*) narrowly avoided dismissal from their posts after some of their recent non-interventionist remarks were denounced as “subversive” speech in the Ontario Legislature.<sup>102</sup> Nevertheless, the undercurrent of Lower’s statement was clear. After six years of adamant denial, he had finally conceded that something abroad posed a real danger to Canada – even if its effects were only indirect ones.

In private, Lower vented his angst in even franker terms. “I write as if war were certain. Is it not? Can you see any way out of it? These magnificent fools who are in charge of England... seem to think they can stop Hitler without fighting Hitler. It is obvious that the only way they can prevent these continental aggressions is to prevent them by force.” Strikingly, Lower now extended blame for the European situation to his own nation’s leader, Mackenzie King, but not for his unwillingness to detach Canada from the sinking British ship. Rather, Lower faulted King for not edging Chamberlain on to take a harder line against Germany when the time was still ripe. If Canada “cannot afford to see that kind of world [i.e. the “Pax Germanica”], then I maintain that we should have been controlling British policy in the last five years... One has such a consciousness of impotence these days. Why is it that it is always, or nearly always, the half-informed and the half-wise and the half-brave who are in command? There is a good deal to be said for heroes, especially when you have heroes to deal with.”<sup>103</sup>

This was a significant new perspective for Lower – and a remarkable turnabout, considering that four years ago he himself dismissed the prospect of Canadians shaping British

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<sup>102</sup> Lower’s take on the controversy was naturally acerbic: “What an extraordinary atmosphere does seem to be generated in Toronto. It often makes me ashamed of my native province. Certainly, left to itself, it would develop all the worst characteristics of totalitarian states, except for the fact that it could not manufacture an ideology. Prostrations before the Idol of Britishism must surely even in Toronto be becoming more ritualistic gestures than anything else.” AL to Gerald Riddell, April 16, 1939, ALF Box 1 File 12. For the full details of the affair, see R. Douglas Francis, *Frank H. Underhill: Intellectual Provocateur* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 109-14.

<sup>103</sup> AL to Jack Pickersgill, April 12, 1939, ALF Box 1 File 13.

policy as an imperialist fantasy. But its broader impact would not be felt until the following spring, when the desperate need for “heroes” moved to the forefront of Lower’s thinking. In the meantime, he spent the remaining pre-war months of 1939 coming to terms with the futility of his old isolationist convictions. The “neutrality league” followed a similar path after Jack Thorson’s bill was talked out of the House of Commons by April. In his final analysis of the group, Lenarcic summarized the league as “simply a temporary pooling of resources” among Canadian neutralists. After its moment passed, they “reverted to the pre-Munich state of affairs... publiciz[ing] their views on an essentially ad hoc basis.”<sup>104</sup>

For his part, Lower reduced his foreign policy activism to a bare minimum during the summer of 1939. After closing out his year at Dalhousie, he made his last pre-war statement of principles that July in Canton, New York for the third biennial Conference on Canadian-American Affairs. Speaking on the subject to of the two countries’ interests in the Pacific, Lower gave his American audience a jarring (but prophetic) ultimatum. Extending his lecture’s topic to both sides of the old world, he warned that the Pacific and Europe were in the same state of extreme flux. “For the first time since the expansion of the English-speaking peoples began, the world they created is in serious danger of being pulled down and another erected in its place.” Americans must soon decide whether their country would continue its traditional policy of “isolation,” or assume the “world leadership” that Great Britain was so “anxious, almost pathetically anxious, to surrender” to it. Whether they admitted it or not, the United States was and “must necessarily be a great power, but if it abandons the outer world to such powers as Germany and Japan, it certainly will not be the greatest of powers, the arbiter of destiny.” The

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<sup>104</sup> Lenarcic, “Pragmatism Over Principle,” 141.

question Lower put before the American people was a simply one, but it demanded a firm answer. “‘What kind of a world do we Americans want to live in?’”<sup>105</sup>

This was not enough to argue his point, though. For added emphasis, Lower used his own country as a counter example; the path a great nation like United States could not take:

No such fate rests upon small powers: they must follow, they cannot lead. No stronger illustration exists than the present passive acquiescence of the Canadian government and people in the policies of Great Britain and their result. Canada has given up one of the most elementary aspects of self-government almost without a second thought (the right to decide the issue of peace and war). In international affairs Canada is not a man but a woman. ‘Whither thou goest,’ she says to her father, John Bull, ‘I will go.’ Like other women, she will pay. She is not even an American woman, for she is not spoiled: she holds her tongue and prepares to do her duty as it is pointed out to her. Her men-folk make her decisions for her – at present it is her father who does, but that other male, her neighbor, Uncle Sam, is increasingly important. It is not clear whether he is an elder brother, long ago estranged, or a fiancé. I think Australia is an adolescent boy, but Canada, I am afraid is a woman, who will always be under the direction of a man... It comes down again to saying that Canada, thanks to the sentimentalism and traditionalism of her own people is in no sense in control of her own destiny.<sup>106</sup>

One can only imagine the pain Lower felt saying such a thing in public, and even more, coming to that conclusion in private. So supremely dismal is this sentiment when contrasted with his earlier, confident, and deeply personal metaphor of Canada the youth – a proud symbol of its ascent to independent nationhood – that this passage almost seems drained of nationalism entirely. In resigning himself to war, he simultaneously resigned himself to Canada’s national inferiority; its colonial nature was apparently inescapable. His plea for Americans to assume the mantle of British world power meshed with his new metaphor of Canadian submission. Lower hoped that the United States would meet his great challenge not just for the sake of “destiny,” but for Canada, too. In doing so, that new and stronger “man” might give Canada a place in the

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<sup>105</sup> “National Interests in the Pacific, American and Canadian,” MS, speech delivered at the Canton, New York Conference on Canadian-American Affairs, June 1939, pages 12-13, AFL Box 12 File 77.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 6-7. In the very next paragraph, Lower strove to make his new metaphor even more degrading. “There is a considerable danger that the present dutiful daughter will wither into an embittered and devitalized old maid. (Such as Scotland)”

world that it could never achieve on its own. In a more than just a sense, this somber speech in July of 1939 was the closest he ever came to “paying up” on his great threat of five years prior.

But Arthur Lower’s faith in Canada was only bent, not broken. The opening years of the Second World War would revitalize his nationalist spirit not in spite of the great conflict, but because of it. The seismic events of 1940 in particular offered Canada a dangerous, but fulfilling, new path. It was also the path opened to Lower. Looking down it, he would see a new purpose, a new future, and a new destiny for himself and his nation together.

### **The Reversing Current, 1939-1940**

Lower’s sharp lurch towards internationalism and interventionism – the remarkably comprehensive reversal of his isolationism – did not happen all at once. His letters from the late fall of 1939 reveal his ambivalence about the nature of the conflict, what Canada was fighting for, and what the costs of fighting would be. There were still heavy traces of his old cynicism and certainties; that it was just another great power struggle (not a uniquely moral war), that it would end as unsatisfyingly as the last war (rather than produce a new and better world order), that its pressures might throw Canada into ruinous civil strife (rather than unify the country with a common purpose and a grand mission in the world).<sup>107</sup>

In the war’s second year, though, the residue of this old mentality was wiped clean from his thinking. From April through June, Lower observed the lightning-pace German advances through Norway, the Low Countries, and eventually France with unbridled alarm. In his memoir, he recalled “how deeply the events of the war were penetrating me” during this trying period. “I

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<sup>107</sup> Lower’s correspondence from the opening months of the war illustrate these themes in full. See ALF Box 1 File 13. For a more concentrated picture of his mixed image of the early war, see a talk he gave in Winnipeg in mid-October. “Canada and the Present War. National Club. October 13, 1939,” ALF Box 1 File 13.



saw it all so clearly... the world revolution that would occur with Great Britain defeated... [an] unready North America waiting for the blows to fall.” Through “those horrible days in June... things infinitely deep were waking up inside me, things over which I had little control. The spirit of my ancestors, I suppose! I could not cut myself off from my past and my father’s past. In the hour of danger I was one with them.”<sup>108</sup>

Well before that crisis point, though, the now fifty-year-old Lower felt the urge to insert himself into the war, only to be rejected for service by the Department of National Defense.<sup>109</sup> The pain of inaction simply became intolerable with the events of spring 1940. Confined to his camp at the Lake of the Woods in far western Ontario after the end of Wesley’s semester, Lower boiled over with angst at events abroad and their implications. “The old familiar world is being destroyed,” he wrote to a close friend, “and God alone knows what is going to be erected in its place... I thought I had in the last five years reconstructed my own world-outlook on a basis rational enough to endure this shock. I find I have not succeeded.”<sup>110</sup>

Indeed, he had not. Lower’s outlook had changed radically since 1936. Europe, Canada, and the whole world were all in a state of “extreme emergency” that demanded a response at every level, including from individuals in North America. “It is maddening to me personally to have to be so passive in this emergency,” he fumed to J.T. Shotwell; “academic research and writing are out of the question.” Lower was not exaggerating. For the remainder of May and long into June, he devoted himself entirely to the one solution he could see to the European war: the

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<sup>108</sup> Lower, *My First Seventy-Five Years*, 242-43.

<sup>109</sup> Lower letter of application requested that he be considered for the Naval Service of Canada, though he admitted that his age made him doubt his prospects. The official reply offered him only the mundane option of giving lectures at its divisional headquarters in Winnipeg. AL to Department of National Defense, November 3, 1939, ALF Box 1 File 13. J.O. Cossette (Naval Secretary) to AL, November 10, 1939, ALF Box 1 File 13.

<sup>110</sup> AL to Arthur Phelps, May 20, 1940, ALF Box 1 File 14.

involvement of the United States. For nearly a full month, Lower shot off frantic letters to Americans he knew personally, to several United States Senators, and to the *New York Times*, impressing upon all of them Britain's desperate need of their aid and the terrible consequences of withholding it. "Many Canadians went into this war very reluctantly," he admitted to Senator Claude Pepper of Florida, "but there are hardly any of us who do not realize that... we have got to overthrow Hitler to prevent him from overthrowing us. You as a great power have more responsibility for that, more to gain and more to lose, than we have... We Canadians are at present fighting your battle: the little fellow is protecting the giant."<sup>111</sup>

Just as this war "madness" reached its peak, Lower wrote his close friend and colleague Harold Innis to give confession for his prewar past:

I examine my conscience from time to time, wondering whether I have been wrong the last few years and the Tommy Church's right. I don't think so: my whole ambition has been to see a people created in Canada first, policy afterward. Neutrality I have always known to be impossible, but it has at times seemed right to look it fully in the face and even use its possibility as a brake to our unthinking jingoes, in the hope that our war program when it came would at least have some common sense. That I think is what we nationalists did accomplish: government was rather slow but it has not made any egregious mistakes, and its efforts are in the right direction, munitions and the air. So my conscience is clear, though I suppose I have at times overstated the case.<sup>112</sup>

Later in the year, well after his passions had cooled, Lower reiterated that sentiment in an article for *Queen's Quarterly*.

Those persons who, like the present writer, claimed that Canada, if she so desired could shape her own fate, knew very well that nothing was less likely than that she would do so: their position was never more than educational, an attempt to arouse their countrymen to the necessity of making their own decisions and primarily in their own national interests, if Canada were ever to occupy a place in the world and in the Empire worth having.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> AL to Claude Pepper, June 21, 1940, ALF Box 1 File 14. Most of Lower's letters were to academics in Massachusetts whom he had known since the 1920s, but he also wrote to professors at colleges farther afield.

<sup>112</sup> AL to Harold Innis, June 16, 1940, ALF Box 1 File 14.

<sup>113</sup> A.R.M. Lower, "Canada and Foreign Policy," *Queen's Quarterly* 47 (Winter 1940), 422.

These *mea culpa*e were cleverly constructed. Both contained some honest self-reflection on the nationalist core of Lower's isolationist activism. The minds of the Canadian people were the target of his activism, and urging them on towards independent thinking and self-interested decision making was his basic ends. Indeed, so elemental were those national goals that in 1940 he could completely reverse his old course on the fundamental issues of Canadian international responsibility and involvement war itself when both seemed to offer a new path forward to Canadian nationhood.<sup>114</sup> Writing much farther in hindsight, Lower could even take some half-hearted pride that by waiting a symbolic seven days before following Britain into war the Canadian Parliament, "in the slithery [Mackenzie] King way," had finally asserted Canada's right to "decide the issue of war and peace for ourselves."<sup>115</sup> But the claim that his isolationism was nothing more than an exercise in national "education" was simply insincere.

It was true that doubts about its ultimate viability nagged him through decade, just as it was true that he showed a great deal of flexibility in altering the ideology as he saw fit. Yet through the period of 1933-1939, he advocated for it with remarkable consistency. Far more than that, a policy and a public mentality of isolationism was something he demanded of Canada in the strongest terms – up to and including the implosion of the country if it failed to heed his warnings against war. It was also insincere of Lower to suggest that his isolationist principles existed apart from his nationalist ones. This was not the case. He chose to interweave them in a fundamental way; the two were inseparable within his broader Canadian vision because they so neatly complimented one another.

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<sup>114</sup> "The sooner our authorities learn that *our responsibilities extend to every sphere of the war*, the better; the sooner they *get out of the Canadian parish and into the stream of world affairs*, the better. Canada can never pull her full weight until Canadians overcome the notion that their place is a subordinate one, their business mainly to work hard and think little, until in short they *accept the full burden of nationhood*." Ibid., 425. Emphasis added.

<sup>115</sup> Lower, *My First Seventy-Five Years*, 222.

Lower did know that participation in another British war was Canada's future by default. But until the very eve of that war's actual outbreak, he did not resign himself to that fate. For six years he promoted a cause so radical it nearly cost him the professorship that was the dream of his youth. For six years he passionately defended that cause in print and in person, spreading his message in every outlet he could access. For six years he believed isolationism could prevail in Canada because it had to, for his nation's sake and for his own. Even though it could not survive the very war it intended Canada to avoid, it was Arthur Lower's faith.

## CONCLUSION

No historical comparison is without flaws, and the one to be drawn between Lincoln Colcord and Arthur Lower is no exception. Besides the fact that they were men of different countries, they also had different upbringings, educations, and professions. Even within their careers as isolationist activists they had different levels of output as writers, used different mediums for airing their views, and in the end, reacted entirely differently to the outbreak of the Second World War and each of their nations' involvement in it. The degree to which they can be used to represent the ideology of isolationism in America and Canada is also open to question. Writing in the 1960s, historian Manfred Jonas notably delineated American isolationists into no less than five distinct subgroups.<sup>1</sup> A Canadian observer of the 1930s, on the other hand, saw three variations within his country's isolationist movement versus just two in the United States.<sup>2</sup>

Yet the facts remain in support of the comparison. Colcord and Lower were isolationists by their own definitions and were fully conscious of where they stood in contemporary politics. The ideas they espoused under the banner of that worldview were generally clear, comprehensive, and showed strong similarities to those of other isolationists of the interwar era in their respective countries. Furthermore, they were connected to a breadth of those likeminded people directly by correspondence, group affiliation, and even attempts at coordinated activism. By their efforts, Colcord and Lower helped to shape an intellectual and political current far bigger than either one of them alone. Their writing, activism, and even their personal characters

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<sup>1</sup> Manfred Jonas, *Isolationism in America, 1935-1941* (Chicago: Imprint Publications, 1990), 34-35, 41-42.

<sup>2</sup> "Isolationism has two meanings for the United States, but three for Canada. For the United States, it may, or may not, include the Monroe Doctrine. For Canada, it may mean the isolation of Canada and the United States as a North American unit, or the isolation of the British Empire including Canada, or the isolation of Canada from all countries including both members of the British Empire and the United States." *Canada and Her Great Neighbor: Sociological Surveys of Opinions and Attitudes in Canada Concerning the United States*, H.F. Angus, ed. (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1938), 355n50.

all offer many strong points of comparison – ones which reflect isolationism in the United States and Canada as an ideology of North American themes with national variations.

Realism, for instance, was the *sine qua non* of their isolationisms. In fact, both men identified as “realists” far more often than they did as “isolationists.” And in tandem with that, they derided their ideological foes as mired in “emotionalism,” “intellectual dishonesty,” or British-colonial “sentiment” to emphasize the contrast. Realism to Colcord and Lower meant the frankest consideration of international circumstances and a dedication to framing that consideration in the context of their own countries’ national interests.<sup>3</sup> All the way through their isolationist careers, the principle of doing what was best for America and Canada first was their guiding light. To that end, they were intensely interested in foreign events and the appropriate distance their own countries ought to have from them.<sup>4</sup> Yet they were not single-mindedly focused on the wider world. On the contrary, both cared about domestic politics just as deeply. For Colcord, his original concerns during the 1930s were the socially and economically corrupting effects of the New Deal; for Lower, they were the base materialism and degrading colonial mentality which he saw as endemic among his fellow English Canadians. In both their cases, these internal affairs of their nations regularly overlapped with external concerns within their larger worldviews.

Colcord and Lower were true hardliners who pushed their positions as far as they could and asserted them as aggressively as possible. They took isolationism so seriously because it was

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<sup>3</sup> In his memoir, Lower himself defined the “*Realpolitik*” he followed in the 1930s as “the frank facing that the foreign policy of a nation must turn upon its own interests and, still more, that external politics rest relentlessly on armed might.” To this way of thinking, he admitted, “Canadians as a group were almost complete strangers.” Arthur Lower, *My First Seventy-Five Years* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1967), 231.

<sup>4</sup> Manfred Jonas has a useful phrase to capture this mindset, although in Lower’s case, an exception would have to be made in light of his intense dislike for Britain specifically. “The key to isolationist thinking was not liking or dislike for particular foreign powers, but studied indifference to all of them.” Jonas, *Isolationism in America*, 184.

a matter of the highest national interest to stay out of foreign wars in Europe and Asia. This is the most consistent common theme of their writing. From the time of their very first forays into interwar isolationism – 1932 for Colcord and 1933 for Lower – there was always this imperative in their appeals. If America and Canada as nations, and Americans and Canadians as peoples, did not heed their warnings against intervention in wars abroad, the consequences – which did vary between the two men in crucial ways – would be dire and even existential. Furthermore, the best means both men could see to keep their countries out of war was a foreign policy and public attitude of neutrality. To achieve neutrality in the latter, popular capacity – which would lay the groundwork for neutrality as an actual policy – Colcord and Lower both focused their isolationist polemics on demystifying international affairs and revealing the legitimate and practicable bases for non-entanglement and non-intervention.

As for the specifics of their arguments, a keen awareness of geography was almost inevitably a shared position. Both men argued that North America was naturally secure against all threats from abroad. Lower, however, was stressing this point from the very start of his isolationist career whereas Colcord only began to do so in early 1939. They stressed the geographic security of their nations because both viewed the political and military struggles of the Old World as problems which the New World could never help to resolve. In their long-term visions, they felt it best to leave Europe and East Asia to fight their own battles while America and Canada stood on the sidelines. Historians of isolationism on both sides of the border have noted the importance of a North American (or in the U.S. case, sometimes Western Hemispheric) outlook and a pervasive hostility to Europe as central elements of the ideology.<sup>5</sup> Neither man,

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<sup>5</sup> Damien-Claude Bélanger, for instance, notes that a “continentalist” perspective of Canada’s past and present was noticeably common among historians of Lower’s generation. Lower was only one of a legion of interwar Canadian academics who took an increasingly warm view of the United States (and in conjunction, an increasingly hostile view of Europe) in the decade before the Second World War. Bélanger also identifies “North American

however, believed that isolationism entailed economic detachment from the rest of the world.

Lower recognized that Canada's dependence on foreign trade was an unignorable factor precluding a "rigorously" isolationist foreign policy, but also argued that its economy would not be negatively affected by neutrality. Its commodities would always be in demand and could just as easily be sold to both sides of a given conflict rather than just the one it was allied with.

Colcord took a similar line. He, too, advocated for supplying both sides, but for the simpler reason that this was the only policy consistent with "true" neutrality in the first place. He also showed even less concern than Lower did with the possibility of American economic suffering amidst a radically changing global status quo. His only advice was to accept it and carry on.<sup>6</sup>

As a kind of hedge to their arguments for geographic security, Colcord and Lower also asserted that their countries faced no direct threats from anywhere abroad and none that could be realistically carried out in any event. Again, though, there was a difference in timing. Lower was driving this point home continuously from the very beginning in 1933, while Colcord only made the argument from 1939 on – ironically, at just about the same moment Lower began to shift his position and see a threat to Canada from Germany. Additionally, both men reacted to growing

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isolationism" as a distinct and prominent strain of the continentalist school of thought, one typified by the writings of Lower, Frank Underhill, and F.R. Scott. Damien-Claude Bélanger, *Prejudice and Pride: Canadian Intellectuals Confront the United States, 1891–1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014). Emily Rosenberg has noted that many prominent American isolationists, including Charles Beard and George Peek, strongly focused on continental insularity and national self-sufficiency as alternatives to risky overseas expansion. Emily Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 171-72. For a similar assessment of Beard's continentalism and anti-expansionism, see Ronald Radosh, *Prophets on the Right: Profiles of Conservative Critics of American Globalism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975), 17-37.

<sup>6</sup> It bears noting that many American isolationists took the economic issue more seriously than Colcord did. Between 1939 and 1941, as Germany and Japan looked primed to dominate Europe and East Asia long into the future, isolationists fleshed out a diverse array of strategies for their own country to survive the new status quo. For some, that meant national economic autarky, for others, pivoting American trade away from the Old World and towards the Western Hemisphere. Others still saw significant advantages for the United States in a world divided into spheres of influence. None of the isolationists, however, saw the economic consequences of Axis predominance abroad as worth war. For the full catalogue of these views, see Chapter 9 of Justus D. Doenecke, *Storm on the Horizon: The Challenge to American Intervention, 1939-1941* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 139-49.



German power in Europe by accepting (and in Lower's case, enthusiastically promoting) the build-up of American and Canadian national defenses. But yet again, this shift occurred at different times, early 1937 for Lower and the summer of 1940 for Colcord.

This fact also raises another important point of comparison: their mutual focus on Europe over Asia. Granted, Colcord's first isolationist article was a commentary on the invasion of Manchuria, and Lower was a well-published and recognized expert on Canada's connection to the Pacific region. Yet the looming struggle between the great powers of Europe was always their primary concern. This was simply because the anxiously awaited renewal of hostilities between Britain and Germany specifically (and to a lesser extent, between Britain and Italy) was anticipated by both men as the foreign conflict that posed the single greatest danger of pulling the United States and Canada into its vortex of destruction.

As part of their efforts to keep their countries out of that second Great War, Colcord and Lower also emphatically denied that there was any moral justification for intervention in a war between Germany and Britain or any other foreign war. In keeping with their realism, they saw conflicts abroad as driven by power politics and nothing more.<sup>7</sup> They even seemed to relish the toppling of old idols dearly held by Americans and English Canadians – Britain and its Empire, the League of Nations, the illusory ideal of international cooperation itself. But this became a tremendously difficult feat as world events piled up, and neither of them could do it consistently. Colcord decidedly favored one side of the Spanish Civil War and made that feeling public. And under questioning in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, he admitted that Britain had far more of his personal sympathy than Germany did. Lower, likewise, put his name to a public

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<sup>7</sup> Ross Kennedy places this common understanding (and acceptance) of international power politics at the "core" of American isolationism during the 1930s, a fact which he claims is too often overlooked in the older scholarship like Jonas and Cole. Ross Kennedy, "The Ideology of American Isolationism, 1931-1939," *Cercles* 5 (2002), 57-58.

letter condemning the Japanese war in China, and after the outbreak of war between Britain and Germany in 1939, he threw his full support behind the “motherland” in its struggle for survival.

Colcord’s and Lower’s convictions about the futility of involvement in foreign wars and the eternal nature of power politics were largely based on their jaundiced memories of the First World War. Both men used this war and its failures as a solid anchor for their isolationist arguments. There is a major difference, though, in the timing that they came to their conclusions. Before 1933, there was not a trace of Great War skepticism in Lower’s writing. His revisionism emerged simultaneously with his isolationism. This presents a stark contrast with Colcord, who questioned the morality of the war while it was ongoing. Colcord was a “revisionist” in 1915, and in conjunction with that, an anti-interventionist as well. He turned a blind eye to his own initial perspective after the U.S. entered the war and his youthful idealism was stoked to a white heat. But as Wilsonian internationalism slowly proved hollow, he returned to anti-interventionism with a strongly anti-Wilson slant in 1919 and 1920. It was from this personal foundation that Colcord belatedly constructed his ideological isolationism of the 1930s.

The first major difference between Colcord’s and Lower’s isolationisms is also a national difference between their two countries. While American foreign policy during the 1920s and 30s was far from devotedly isolationist, the United States was not a member of the League of Nations and thus had no legal obligation to defend its collective security system as it was tested by conflicts in China, Africa, and Europe (all tests which the League ultimately failed). Canada, on the other hand, was a member of the League from its establishment in 1919 and was a fairly enthusiastic participant both on its own and as an ally of Britain.<sup>8</sup> Colcord and Lower harshly

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<sup>8</sup> The premier monograph on this remains Richard Veatch, *Canada and the League of Nations* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975).

criticized the League and the flaws of the collective security idea. But only Lower had to accommodate the reality of his country's membership. The challenge for him was to balance the potential benefits with Canada's attendant responsibility to confront "aggression" wherever the League found it.

Far more serious than the League, though, was Canada's place in the British Empire. There was no American parallel for the relationship Canada had with Britain in the 1930s.<sup>9</sup> Even after the passage of the Statute of Westminster in 1931, which gave Canada the legal right to decide its own course in world affairs, English Canadians as people were still indelibly bound to Britain by ties of empire, race, history, and sentiment. Lower recognized this fact even before he began his isolationist career, and he made it his mission in life to erode those ties by every rhetorical means at his disposal. Lower's hostility towards Britain was truly colossal, and the only conceivable parallel for Colcord's case would have to be his intensely personal resentment of Woodrow Wilson – the man he held responsible for facilitating the unstable world situation of the 1930s and for poisoning the American mind with his impossible internationalist idealism.

This difference between American and Canadian external commitments no doubt played a part in the difference of output for Colcord's and Lower's isolationist work. Far from a flaw to this study, the gulf is an appropriate reflection of that national divide. Both men wrote in reaction to the danger of their nations' involvement in wars overseas, but the ebb and flow of that danger was different for the two of them. Colcord wrote only when certain spectacular events – both foreign and domestic – raised the danger to a momentary pitch. Hence his public activity spiked

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<sup>9</sup> The argument of historian John Moser should be noted, however, that while "Anglophobia" was a powerful cultural and political current that had long existed "independent of isolationism," during the 1930s and 40s there was indeed a real "relationship" between the two stemming from a number of factors: anti-British ethnic groups like Germans and Irish, anti-imperialist liberals, and Mid- and Far-Western progressives. John Moser, *Twisting the Lion's Tail: American Anglophobia between the World Wars* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 5, 94-96.

around the time of the Manchurian invasion, the Italian-Ethiopian War, the passage of the three successive Neutrality Acts, the Munich Crisis, the German military triumphs of spring 1940, and the Lend Lease fight, but went largely dormant during the lulls in between. Lower, by contrast, wrote and spoke regularly on foreign affairs year after year, but this was more than just a result of his generally high productivity. He wrote because the possibility of foreign war for Canada came through its connections to Britain and the League. These were more dangerous at some moments than others, of course, but they were constants nevertheless, and addressing them even during the more tranquil moment of that raucous decade was not overzealous on his part.

Another major point of difference is also a point of comparison: their conceptions of national responsibility. Both men explicitly argued their nations had no moral, political, or strategic obligation to intervene in foreign conflicts. Indeed, even while accepting Canadian involvement in the League of Nations, Lower methodically contrived multiple ways to ensure Canadian non-involvement in potential “League wars.” But in justifying isolationism for Canada, Lower also argued that his country had a better claim to it than its southern neighbor, which, as he often described with open admiration, actually had installed isolationism as its foreign policy.<sup>10</sup> Canada, in Lower’s thinking, was a small power which could not hope to affect the course of events abroad. And even better than the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, it also had the world’s most powerful buffer state to guard its southern flank. The United States, on the other

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<sup>10</sup> This belief of Lower’s raises another, relatively obvious point of contrast – external intellectual influence. Lower read American periodicals and was particularly familiar with the historian and isolationist Charles Beard. In early 1936, Lower strongly recommended an article in *The New Republic* by Beard, “a man whose humanity cannot be doubted and whose knowledge few people on the continent can approach who unhesitatingly goes for isolation. And yet morally the American position is not as strong as ours, for they are the conspicuous example of power without responsibility.” Arthur Lower to Brooke Claxton, March 19, 1936, ALF Box 20 File 122. This was similar to Lower’s isolationist counterpart Frank Underhill, who also took inspiration from Beard’s work on the national interest and First World War revisionism. Michiel Horn, *The League for Social Reconstruction: Intellectual Origins of the Democratic Left in Canada, 1930-1942* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 150. It almost goes without saying that Lincoln Colcord was not taking cues from *Dalhousie Review* or *Canadian Defense Quarterly*.

hand, was undeniably a great power and thus did have a responsibility to participate in the organization of any international system. This convenient and self-serving conclusion was the polar opposite of Colcord's. He could agree that America's power was great, but it was precisely that vast power which demanded American neutrality. Here Colcord's memory of the First World War was crucial. Its lesson to him was that the United States could only be a disruptive force in world affairs. American involvement in other nations' conflicts created imbalances in the fighting and encouraged outcomes (like the Treaty of Versailles) that could not be sustained. By staying out of foreign wars, not only would they end sooner and thus with less devastation, they would also conclude with a status quo based on the realities of the region rather than temporary American intervention.

Ultimately, however, if the comparison this thesis presents is to have any value, it ought to be in three critical points. The first is that for Colcord and Lower, American and Canadian involvement in foreign wars during the interwar period was always a matter of choice, and that the American and Canadian peoples themselves played a critical role in the choosing. Neither Colcord nor Lower saw neutrality – applied isolationism – in a purely or even predominately legal light. Just as the Statue of Westminster had not “given” Canada its sovereign nationhood (and thus, the right to be neutral), so too had the Neutrality Act done nothing to make America a “neutral” nation. Isolationism, neutrality, and realism alike all came only from within, and both men thus gave tremendous attention to “converting” their countrymen to those ways of thinking.

That they attempted this at all illustrates the second critical point: neither of them saw the current of public opinion trending in their direction. Rather, they saw Americans and Canadians (or more specifically, English Canadians) as mired in fundamentally flawed ways of thinking about foreign affairs that could only lead their countries into foreign wars. Just once, in 1933, did

Lower ever expect that his countrymen would choose to be neutral in the next British war. The dominant theme of his isolationist writing through the decade was a bitter rage that they would inevitably do just the opposite, and no matter how catastrophically Britain failed in managing its own foreign policy. Remarkably, considering the popular conception of interwar American public opinion as dominated by “isolationist” sentiment, Colcord was not much more convinced of his people’s “good sense” than Lower was.<sup>11</sup> In Colcord’s eyes, the public was only fooling itself by thinking that the Neutrality Act, “cash-and-carry,” or “aid-short-of-war” for Britain were in any way consistent with authentic neutrality or that they would somehow stave off the real dangers ahead. Ever the Cassandra, he warned that both the American government and the American people had already taken sides in the coming European war as early as 1937. He continued in that vein in 1939, 1940, and all the way up to Pearl Harbor. Though he believed even in late 1941 that most ordinary Americans still did not want their country to be part of actual warfare in Europe and Asia, he also saw all too clearly that no other conclusion was possible with the policies and sympathies of the nation as they were.

That terrible conclusion raises the final critical point of the comparison: just what exactly Colcord and Lower were afraid would happen to their countries if they went to war abroad. Manfred Jonas has written that a deep-seated fear of war (along a preference for unilateralism) was the bedrock of American isolationism during the interwar period.<sup>12</sup> This same principle holds true for the Canadian variety as well. The basic function of isolationism in both countries

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<sup>11</sup> Granted, Colcord’s career did not suffer in any noticeable way from his isolationist activism, although he complained often that views such as his did not get a full hearing in the American press. This was not necessarily the norm, though. In early 1941, two of Colcord’s closest isolationist colleagues, Oswald Garrison Villard and John T. Flynn, both lost their columns in the *New Republic* and the *Nation* (respectively) because of their views. Their experience comes closer to matching that Lower, who received tremendous pushback from the public after his loud declaration of isolationist sentiment in 1934. Although he gloried in the controversy and remained an aggressive isolationist long into the decade, he did show fear for his professional future at least privately by 1936.

<sup>12</sup> Jonas, *Isolationism in America*, 23.

was to keep them out of war, but the motivation for that priority was different in crucial ways. The divide is perfectly embodied in the work of Lincoln Colcord and Arthur Lower.

Colcord's isolationism was primarily focused on preserving American democracy at home, and in the secondary position, not letting his country affect international affairs for the worse as it had in the Great War. His fear for American democracy was a logical extension of his intense criticism of the New Deal. Colcord had suspected FDR of harboring dictatorial intentions long before the president's political pivot away from domestic affairs and towards Europe and Asia in late 1938 and early 1939. But beyond just this, war in Colcord's eyes opened the door to a far more terrible fate than a Roosevelt dictatorship alone. By instigating another period of international and domestic chaos (as had arose in 1918 and 1919), the American nation itself would be fundamentally changed for the worse. Colcord's writing from 1937 on – not just that with an isolationist focus, but also his commentary on domestic politics – was often heavily laden with regret that the America he knew and loved seemed to be fading away. All through the 1930s and into the early 40s, he loathed the prospect of a “new world” as false, impossible, and loaded with hidden dangers – just as it had been in the Wilson era. But all through those very same years, a new world is exactly what loomed on America's fast-approaching horizon.

Colcord's views after 1936 fit in with two of Jonas' isolationist subgroups, the “conservatives” and the “liberals.” His concern with the preservation of the American social and economic system made him a “conservative.” His concern with the preservation of American democracy and the threat of dictatorship made him a “liberal.”<sup>13</sup> The latter of these two

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 71-86. Additionally, Colcord's fear that American economic power could be a disruptive force in foreign wars shows some similarity to what Jonas describes as the “timid” isolationist position. Proponents of this branch of isolationism argued that by remaining at peace, the United States could show the rest of the world that “not all conflicts had to assume global proportions.” Ibid., 68-69.

subgroups could also be tied to Christopher Nichols' contention that a vital element of the "new isolationism" of the 1930s was preserving of America's "exceptionalist and domestic mission" as a beacon of democratic government and domestic morality.<sup>14</sup> But no matter how it is framed – liberal, conservative, or exceptionalist – American isolationism as Colcord practiced it was fundamentally a preventative measure. Much like his opposition to the New Deal, its central purpose was to keep America as it already was. If war could only precipitate negative domestic change, then forestalling American intervention was the highest national imperative.

Ironically, though, it was Lower who regretfully recognized his isolationist platform was essentially "negative," meaning a defensive foreign policy that was not bold enough to capture the Canadian people's confidence and respect.<sup>15</sup> The irony of this is not that Lower was totally wrong. Far from it. A reasonable analog to Colcord's fear of the decay of American democracy under the strain of war would be Lower's fear of Canada being rent apart in civil war between its British, French, and continental European components. But in crafting his isolationism, Lower gave it something more than a mere defensive posture to preserve what Canada already had (its real but precarious social unity). Rather, what most distinguished his Canadian isolationism from Colcord's American was its comprehensive merger with Canadian nationalism. With this fusion, isolationism assumed an additional role that was essentially positive rather than negative. A policy and public attitude of isolationism – as expressed by Canada's government and people choosing not to follow Britain into its next war – was the last and most difficult step towards fulfilling the long evolution of Canada from a colony to a nation. Lower was not alone in

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<sup>14</sup> Christopher McKnight Nichols, *Promise and Peril: America at the Dawn of a Global Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 350.

<sup>15</sup> Writing in 1940, he described this as the principle cause of the Canadian isolationism's ultimate failure. The "speed and ease" with that arguments like his "were forgotten" indicated "what little impression the essentially negative and passive policy of isolationism had made in Canada" A.R.M. Lower, *Canada and the Far East – 1940* (New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1941), 105.



innovative strategy for justifying isolationism. This was the final argument of the Canadian “neutrality league” of 1939 in its brief campaign to enunciate the “right” of Canada to a neutral foreign policy. Lower’s brother-in-arms Frank Underhill made the same point as well. In an article praising Prime Minister King for “an admirable exposition of the case of the so-called ‘isolationists,’” Underhill stressed that “‘isolationism’ is not a mere selfish negative desire to escape from the outer world but is based upon a positive ideal of Canadian achievement.”<sup>16</sup>

But Lower and his cohort also knew that even with this potent argument, their task was still a daunting one bordering on impossible. The arguments and invective of Canadian isolationism simply could not keep the country from aiding Britain when the call finally came. Its promoters like Lower could easily fantasize in times of peace, and with the added stimulus of intense revulsion toward contemporary British policy, that Canada might resist the powerful impulse to support its mother country. But despite years of hypothesizing and preparation, even Lower himself could not help reversing course in the face of real events. “Not yet,” the poet-isolationist F.R. Scott wrote in 1939, “has the tide of public feeling turned sufficiently to make a policy of neutrality dominant in the country. Tradition and sentiment die hard.”<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, they did. So hard, in fact, that it took nothing less than the full course of Canadian participation in the Second World War to mortally weaken them. The tradition of isolationism in America died hard, too, and from the very same cause. The dual forces of dramatically worsening circumstances abroad and FDR’s authoritative leadership at home combined to cripple the efforts of Colcord and his allies in and out of government. From 1939 through to Pearl Harbor, writes Wayne Cole, the isolationists were “relentlessly” driven back

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<sup>16</sup> F.H. Underhill, “Mr. King’s Foreign Policy,” *Canadian Forum* 18, No. 210 (July 1938), 105.

<sup>17</sup> F.R. Scott, “A Policy of Neutrality for Canada,” *Foreign Affairs* 17, No. 2 (January 1939), 412.

back in “engagement after engagement... They never gave up, but Roosevelt won his war against them as decisively as led the United States towards victory against the Axis.”<sup>18</sup> Justus Doenecke seconds the conclusion. At the great crossroads American foreign policy, the anti-interventionists were “defeated at every turn.” By 1941 the tide of public opinion was turning against isolation as the dangers posed by the Axis surpassed the dangers of war itself.<sup>19</sup>

In the final assessment, the comparison of Lincoln Colcord’s and Arthur Lower’s isolationisms reveals the essential weakness of that ideology in the United States and Canada. No matter how passionate, incessant, and elaborate the arguments of people like them, isolation was resoundingly rejected in both countries as a viable foreign policy and as a popular outlook. On the whole, Americans and Canadians alike found greater security and moral satisfaction in policies of support for Britain and opposition to the terrifying advances of the Axis nations. But while American and Canadian isolationism differed in many respects, they were still passionate struggles waged in the name and best interests of the American and Canadian peoples. The decisive collapse of Lower’s isolationism, and Colcord’s futile insistence on retaining his, thus serves as an especially apt metaphor for isolationism in their two nations. The timing of their defeats may have been different, but ultimately, both came to the same end.

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<sup>18</sup> Wayne S. Cole, *Roosevelt and the Isolationists, 1932-1945* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 410.

<sup>19</sup> Doenecke, *Storm on the Horizon*, 327-28.

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James Spruce was born in Bangor, Maine on June 5, 1992 and has lived in Orono ever since. He meandered through all the levels of education the town had to offer up to the University of Maine, where he graduated with a B.A. in 2015 and as a member of the Phi Alpha Theta and Phi Beta Kappa honors societies. Coming from a family of antique dealers, his interest in history began early. That interest was stoked further by enthusiastic reading and several outstanding history and English teachers in Orono's Middle and High School. It continues today at a fever pitch. He is a candidate for the Master of Arts degree in History from the University of Maine in May 2018.